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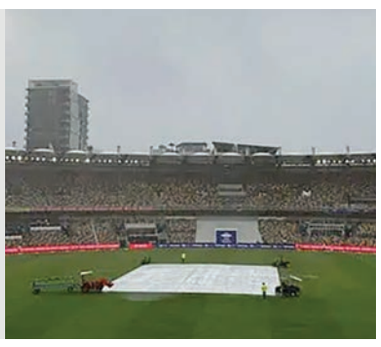

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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K'taka Assembly clears borewell, BBMP tax bill

It also passed 6 other Bills including GST & Ropeways

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

The Karnataka Assembly on Monday unanimously passed eight Bills, including one aimed at protecting the interests of depositors in private financial institutions.

The bills tabled and passed included the Karnataka Goods and Services Tax (Second Amendment) Bill, the Protection of Interest of Depositors in Karnataka Financial Institutions (Amendment) Bill, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (Second Amendment) Bill, and the Karnataka Tourism Ropeways Bill.

Other bills passed were the Basavanbagewadi Development Authority Bill, the Karnataka State Universities (Amendment) Bill, the Chanakya University (Amendment) Bill, and the Karnataka Groundwater (Regulation and Control of Development and Management) (Amendment) Bill.

The borewell bill monitors open borewells, which result in many accidents where children fall, get trapped, and lose their lives. The Bill makes the borewell drillers and the farm owners responsible for any accident.

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (Second Amendment) Bill was tabled by Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar **PHOTO: PTI**

On the Karnataka Protection of Interest of Depositors in Financial Establishments (Amendment) Bill, Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda said the amendment was aimed at establishing the liability of any director, promoter, office-bearer, accountant, agent or partner of the establishment or former directors, partners, promoters who have resigned from the establishment. Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (Second Amendment) Bill was tabled in the Legislative Assembly by Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who is also the Bengaluru Development Minister. Speaking after tabling the Bill, he said, "We had given a deadline of 30 November to pay tax arrears through the One Time Settlement scheme. Rs 1,200 crore has been collected through this scheme till now from about 3 lakh properties and tax from 2.26 lakh properties is due."

Meanwhile, Minister Sharan Prakash Patil said the government plans to build cancer hospitals in five locations across the state, to reduce the need for patients to travel to Bengaluru for treatment.

Replying to a question from MLC M Nagaraj in the Legislative Council, the State Medical Education Minister said, priority is being given to the establishment of these hospitals, ensuring they are "equipped with all necessary facilities". "While I was Minister in the previous government, I established a cancer centre in Kalaburagi, and I have now sanctioned 250 beds for it. The government has already taken steps to set up well-equipped cancer hospitals in Karwar, Mandya, Shivamogga, Mysuru, and Tumakuru," Patil said.

—Salar News with Agencies

WILL BE REFERRED TO PANEL

Following its introduction, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla will refer the bill to a joint committee of both Houses for extensive consultations **PHOTO: PTI**

LS to introduce ONOE Bill today

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

A constitutional amendment bill aimed at holding Lok Sabha and assembly elections simultaneously is set to be introduced in Parliament on Tuesday. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, commonly known as the "one nation, one election" bill, is expected to be presented by Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal.

Following its introduction, Meghwal will propose that Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla refer the bill to a joint committee of both Houses for extensive consultations. The committee will be formed based on the pro-portional strength of various political parties in Parliament, with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) likely taking the chairmanship due to its status as the largest party. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who previously served on a high-level committee recommending phased simultaneous elections led by former president Ram Nath Kovind, is anticipated to be present during the bill's introduction in the Lower House. The Union Cabinet recently endorsed two bills to conduct parliamentary and assembly polls concurrently, while remaining undecided on the process for local body elections. *—PTI*

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'NOT ONE FAMILY'S PROPERTY'

Centre asks Gandhis to return Nehru's letters to museum

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

The Prime Minister's Museum and Library (PMML) has appealed to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to return the collection of historical letters belonging to former prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. These letters were removed from public access in 2008 at the request of Sonia Gandhi, the then-chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), and have since been stored privately.

BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra stated that these documents, which include letters exchanged between Neh-ru and prominent figures such as Edwina Mountbatten, Jayaprakash Narayan, and Jagjivan Ram, should be considered national property rather than personal belongings.

Patra highlighted that the letters were returned to Gandhi in 2008 by the Nehru Museum and Library Society, which had previously housed them. He raised concerns during the Lok Sabha's Question Hour regarding the matter, prompting a response from Union Culture Minister Gejendra Singh Shekhawat. The minister noted that Patra's questions were supplementary and unrelated to the day's main discussions, but assured that the suggestions would be considered.

Over 51 cartons of Jawaharlal Nehru's correspondences were handed over to the Gandhis **PHOTO: PTI**

Patra further disclosed that 51 cartons of Nehru's correspondences were handed over to Gandhi with the approval of the museum's former director. Recently, Rizwan Kadri, a member of the society managing the PMML, contacted Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, seeking assistance in reclaiming the papers but reportedly received no response.

The BJP spokesperson accused the Gandhi family of feeling a sense of entitlement over Nehru's writings, questioning the necessity of keeping the letters secret.

He emphasised the historical significance of these documents and their value as part of India's heritage, asserting that the process of digitisation for these records began back in 2010.

—PTI

On 1st trip to India, Lanka Prez snubs China

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Disanayaka on Monday clearly conveyed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the island nation's soil will not be allowed for use against India's interests, an assurance that came amid concerns in New Delhi over China's attempts to increase its influence over Colombo.

Disanayaka, on a three-day visit to India, held wide-ranging talks with Prime Minister Modi that saw both sides deciding to soon conclude a defence cooperation agreement and ramp up energy ties by establishing electricity grid connectivity and multi-product petroleum pipelines.

Modi conveyed to Disanayaka India's consistent support to the island nation in its quest for economic recovery and stability. Sri Lanka was reeling under a massive economic crisis two years back and India extended financial assistance worth USD 4 billion to the country.

The two leaders instructed officials to finalise discussions on the bilateral MoU on debt restructuring.

In his remarks, the Sri Lankan leader said the Modi has given an assurance to always protect the territorial integrity and sov-ereignty of Sri Lanka.

Underlining importance of connectivity, Modi said a decision was taken to initiate a ferry service between Rameshwaram and Talaimannar.

The prime minister said he and the Sri Lankan leader also deliberated on the fishermen issue and agreed that a "humanitari-an approach" should be adopted on it.

Modi hoped that the Sri Lankan government will fulfil the aspirations of the Tamil people in the island nation.

Disanayaka further thanked India for extending financial assistance of USD 20.66 million to settle payments due from Sri Lanka for projects completed under existing Lines of Credit.

—PTI

12 INDIANS DEAD AT GEORGIA'S GUDAURI RESORT

TBILISI, 16 DEC

In a heartbreaking incident, twelve Indian nationals were found dead at a restaurant in Gudauri, a moun-tain resort in Georgia. According to the Indian mission in Tbilisi, initial investigations by Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs revealed no signs of injury or violence, with all victims succumbing to carbon monoxide poisoning.

Whilst the Indian mission confirmed that all 12 deceased were Indian nationals, the Georgian internal affairs ministry's statement indicated that 11 were foreigners, and one was a Georgian citizen. The victims, who were reportedly employees of the same Indian restaurant, were discovered in their bedrooms on the second floor.

The Indian mission expressed their deepest condolences to the bereaved families and stated they would provide all possible assistance while liaising with local authorities for further details.

A forensic medical examination has also been ordered.

—PTI

Environmentalist & Padma Shri winner Tulsi is no more

PATNA, 16 DEC

Noted environmentalist and Padma Shri awardee Tulsi Gowda died on Monday of age-related ailments in Honnalli village in Karwar district. She was 86. Hailing from the Halakki tribal community, Tulsi Gowda was renowned for planting and nurturing lakhs of trees in her vicinity, effectively creating her own forest. In recognition of her contributions, Dharwad Agricultural University honoured her with a doctorate. Acknowledging her life-long dedication, the Government of India honoured her with the Padma Shri award in 2021. Known as the 'Vruksha Maate' (Mother of Trees), is survived by her two children and four grandchildren. *—Agencies*

Raitha Sangha plans Rail Roko on 18 Dec in K'taka

MYSURU, 16 DEC

Members of Karnataka Rajya Raitha Sangha have decided to conduct a Rail Roko protest across the State on 18 December to highlight the deteriorating health of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on a hunger strike at Shambhu border. The Sangha has extended their support to Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SMK) and other farmer organisations that are agitating against the Union government at Shambhu border, demanding legal guarantee on MSP and pressing other demands of farmers. State Farmers Federation President Kurubur Shanthakumar said the Rail Roko protest across the will be held between noon and 3pm on 18 December. *—Salar News*

Zakir Hussain to be laid to rest on Wednesday

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Zakir Hussain, the exuberant maestro of tabla who once called the instrument his "mate, brother and friend" and embodied the universality of music in his 60-year career, died in a San Francisco hospital ear-ly Monday. He was 73.

The last rites will take place either on Wednesday or Thursday, they said.

Hussain, the globally recognised musician and one of India's most celebrated, was suffering from idio-pathic pulmonary fibrosis, a lung disease, his family said in a statement.

Confirmation of the death of the music legend -- who cruised through genres, be it western or jazz, with the same ease and mastery with which he drummed out rhythm and magic from the tabla -- came after hours of fevered speculation on social media.

The tabla virtuoso had been in hospital for the last two weeks and was shifted to ICU after his condition deteriorated. He was just seven when he gave his first performance and started touring at the age of 12. In his early career, Hussain went on to collaborate with Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan and Shivkumar Sharma. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 5

Hussain brought the tabla to the global stage, captivating millions with his unparalleled rhythm Through this, he seamlessly blended Indian classical traditions with global music, thus becoming an icon of cultural unity

—Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Tabla Maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain was a true legend whose rhythms transcended borders and united hearts. His contribution to Indian classical music and global art is unparalleled

—Siddaramaiah, CM

HUNDREDS FEARED DEAD AS CYCLONE DEVASTATES FRANCE

CAPE TOWN, 16 DEC

France was rushing help by ship and military aircraft to its poor overseas territory of Mayotte in the Indian Ocean on Monday after the island was shattered by its worst storm in nearly a century.

Authorities in Mayotte fear hundreds and possibly thousands of people have died in Cyclone Chido, alt-hough the official death toll on Monday morning stood at 14. French authorities said more than 800 more personnel were expected to arrive in the coming days as rescuers comb through the devastation caused by Chido when it hit the densely populated archipelago of around 3,00,000 people on Saturday. *—PTI*

SUPREME COURT SAYS

'Shouting Jai Shri Ram in mosque not offence'

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

The Supreme Court on Monday asked how raising the slogan of "Jai Shri Ram" a criminal offence.

A bench of Justices Pankaj Mithal and Sandeep Mehta made the observation while hearing a plea chal-lenging a 13 September Karnataka High Court's order quashing criminal proceedings against two persons for allegedly shouting "Jai Shri Ram" inside a mosque.

The high court in its order said, "It is not understandable as to how if someone shouts 'Jai Sriram', it would outrage the religious feeling of any class."

"They were shouting a particular religious phrase, or a name. How is that an offence?" asked the bench on the plea filed by complainant Haydhar Ali CM.

The apex court also asked the complainant how the accused persons were identified. "You say they are all under the CCTV… Who identified the persons who came inside?" the bench asked the petitioner's advocate Devadatt Kamat.

When the bench asked, "Have you been able to identify the actual persons who entered the mosque?" Kamat said the state police would have to explain it.

When Kamat said the high court quashed the proceedings even though the investigation in the case was incomplete, the bench said the high court observed the allegations did not touch the ingredients of Sec-tion 503 or Section 447 of the IPC.

While Section 503 of the IPC deals with criminal intimidation, Section 447 pertains to punishment for criminal tres-pass. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

SC to hear on genocide against Muslims

The Supreme Court has requested former bureaucrats and social activists to submit an email for an urgent hearing concerning a 'Dharam Sansad' taking place in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. The petitioners allege that there was an open call for the "genocide of Muslims" associated with the gathering, set to run from 17 to 21 December at the Shiv-Shakti temple complex in Dasna. Lawyer Prashant Bhushan, representing the petitioners, argued that the situation warranted immediate attention, particularly given the event's impending commencement.

City cops shoot at wanted criminal in self-defence

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

The police on Monday morning allegedly shot in the leg a wanted criminal after he attacked an officer who had asked him to surrender on the outskirts of the city, officials said. The incident occurred near Mayasandra village within the Attibele police station limits, they said. Lokesh, 40, who has been arrested, is accused in multiple cases for charges including murder, extortion and kidnapping, police stated. Officials said a police team spotted Lokesh near Mayasandra village and asked him to surrender. However, in an attempt to escape, he attacked one of the officers. This prompted the police team to shoot him in the leg in self-defence. Lokesh has been admitted to a hospital to treat the bullet injury and is out of danger, a senior police officer said. *—PTI*

Jog Falls to be closed to public for 3 months

SHIVAMOGGA, 16 DEC

The district administration and Jog Management Authority have announced that access to Jog Falls will be restricted from 1 January to 15 March due to essential development works. The closure is required to facilitate the construction of a new main gate and to enhance basic amenities for visitors. Authorities emphasized that the restrictions are being implemented to ensure public safety and to minimize inconvenience during the construction period. "We request the public's cooperation as we work to improve the facilities at Jog Falls," a statement from the district administration said. For further information, visitors can contact 08182-251444. *—Salar News*

Realtor's house burgled, Rs 50L valuables stolen

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

Thieves broke into the house of a real estate businessman in Jayanagar 4th Block and made away with cash and jewellery worth Rs 50 lakh, police said on Monday. The burglary was committed while the businessman, Nagaraj, and his family were on a trip to Mantra-laya on 13 December. The crime was detected when the family returned on Sunday night and found the main door of their house open. According to Nagaraj, the burglars broke open a cupboard and stole Rs 3 lakh in cash along with half a kilogram of gold and silver jewellery. He immediately lodged a complaint at Tilak Nagar police station. Police have launched an investigation. *—Salar News*

689 booked for DUI & speeding in special drive

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

The City traffic police, during a weeklong drive, have registered 556 cases for drunken driving and 133 cases for speeding, officials said on Sunday. "Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP) conducted the special drive from 9 to 15 December to check driving un-der the influence of alcohol. The drive was conducted across the city, under the jurisdiction of all traffic police stations," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Bengaluru East) Kuldeep Kumar Jain said. "The drive was aimed at ensuring road safety. The traffic police will conduct more such drives to enforce traffic rules and regulations," he added. Under the Bengaluru traffic police norms, if any person is caught driving a vehicle with a blood alcohol level of more than 30mg per 100ml, it is considered as driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol. *—Salar News*

'Have video on Vijayendra's bribing attempt'

Ex-minority panel chief on video has claimed Vijayendra tried to bribe him, says CM

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday said that there was video footage showing former state Minority Commission Chairperson Anwar Manippady accusing state BJP president BY Vijayendra of offering him Rs 150 crore "bribe" to hush up his report on the Waqf encroachments.

Siddaramaiah was responding to Manippady's denial on Sunday that Vijayendra made such an offer to him and instead, accusing Congress leaders of trying to bribe him.

Manippady, as the chairman of the Karnataka State Minority Commission, had prepared the report and submitted it to the then BJP government in March 2012. It was tabled in the legislature in 2020, when the BJP was again in power.

"Manippady had himself said it in the past. Which (statement of his) is right and which one is wrong? Manippady is the one who said it first, based on which we reacted. If he now says no, what should be done, tell me. According to me, our reaction is right," Siddaramaiah said.

"He (Manippady) is the one who had claimed that Rs150 crore was offered to him. There is a video recording. He said it at a press meet. Now, after many years, he is denying it. What should be done, tell me," the CM said.

Asked if he would order a CBI probe into alleged claims by Manippady, the CM said, "He (Manippady) has said it. Let's see. The issue will be raised and discussed."

Vijayendra on Sunday said the Congress was "perturbed" by allegations of corruption and scam against them. *—PTI*

Siddaramaiah *PHOTO: PTI*

Manippady had himself said it in the past. Which (statement of his) is right and which one is wrong? Manippady is the one who said it first, based on which we reacted. If he now says no, what should be done, tell me. According to me, our reaction is right,

-Siddaramaiah

BJP seeks CBI probe into graft slur on Vijayendra

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

The BJP on Monday demanded a CBI inquiry into Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge's allegations of Rs 150 crore "bribe" offer made by party chief BY Vijayendra.

As the Assembly proceedings started, BJP members raised objections over Kharge's accusation in the House on 12 December. Kharge had alleged that Vijayendra, who is also the Shikaripura BJP MLA, offered Rs 150 crore to Manippady not to raise the Waqf land issue.

As Karnataka Minority Commission Chairperson during the previous BJP government in the state, Manippady had submitted a detailed report on the encroachment of Waqf land in the state and the involvement of bigwigs in it.

"The minister had made an allegation in the House in my absence, which was uncalled for. The same was repeated by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

BY Vijayendra *PHOTO: FB*

This was a baseless allegation," Vijayendra said.

The state BJP chief challenged the chief minister to order a CBI inquiry into the alleged Rs 150 crore bribe offer and demanded that the minister should also apologise for his statement.

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka said Kharge made the allegation without giving any prior notice.

In reply, Kharge said his statement is based on Manippady's interview a few years ago and the media reports.

The issue triggered heated arguments between both the BJP and Congress legislators in the House. *—PTI*

DKS accuses Manippady of backtracking under pressure

Belagavi, 16 Dec

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has accused former State Minorities Commission Chairman Anwar Manippady of retracting his earlier statements under political pressure. Speaking at Suvarna Soudha, Shivakumar responded to Manippady's recent shift in stance, saying, "He has made statements on social media claiming to have written to the Prime Minister and Home Minister. If he has documents, let him release them before we do." Shivakumar also addressed the suggestion of handing the case over to the CBI, stating, "We have all the facts. If the CBI requests permission, we'll consider it, but we are not transferring the case." He blamed the media for fuelling confusion over the issue, accusing them of reporting Manippady's earlier statements. *—Salar News*

Illegal iron export: SC restores CBI probe

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

In a relief to the CBI, the Supreme Court on Monday set aside a judgement of the High Court of Karnataka quashing a 2013 criminal case against a MSPL Limited and others in connection with illegal iron ore export.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar asked the Dharwad bench of the High Court of Karnataka to decide the case afresh on charges except the amount of the alleged iron ore exported.

"We have set aside the (HC) judgement. The parties are directed to appear before the high court on 3 February, 2025," the bench said, adding, "We have not expressed any opinion on the merits of the case."

The bench was hearing 11 appeals CBI filed against the 12 December judgement of Justice M Nagaprasanna of the high court.

The HC had quashed the CBI proceedings and said its registration of the case and the filing of the chargesheet against MSPL Limited and others were contrary to law. The apex court empowered the CBI to investigate only cases of export above 50,000 metric tonnes of iron ore without valid permits, but the export quantity alleged in the chargesheet was 39,480 metric tonnes, which is below the threshold, the HC had said. *—PTI*

TO THE FALLEN

Floral tribute was paid to the martyrs at War Memorial in Bengaluru on Monday on the occasion of the Vijay Diwas, marking India's victory in the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

SC transfers probe against Amazon, Flipkart to HC

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

The Supreme Court on Monday said the petitions of e-commerce giants Amazon and Flipkart challenging an order of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) ordering a probe against them for alleged malpractices should be transferred to the Karnataka High Court.

The fair trade regulator CCI ordered the probe against Flipkart and Amazon for alleged malpractices, including deep discounting and tie-ups with preferred sellers on their platforms. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Manmohan issued a notice on the plea filed by the CCI which sought the transfer of the petitions filed by the e-commerce platforms from the high courts to the top court or the Delhi High Court.

"Issue notice. Prima facie, we are of the view that all cases, which are pending in various High Courts should be transferred to Karnataka High Court for hearing," the bench said and posted the matter on 6 January, 2025.

The top court, however, asked the High Court not to proceed with the hearing on the petitions filed by e-commerce giants. During the hearing, attorney general R Venkataramani submitted CCI did not have an objection if the matter was heard by High Court. The CCI sought directions to transfer the cases pending before the high courts of Allahabad, Madras, Telangana, Punjab & Haryana, Delhi and Karnataka, either to the Supreme Court or the Delhi High Court. *—PTI*

Following the protest at Channamma Circle, the community members continued their dharna at Gandhi Bhavan *PHOTO: PTI*

Panchamasalis protests for 2A quota in Belagavi

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

After their request for permission to hold a protest in front of the Suvarna Vidhan Soudha was denied for the second time, members of the Panchamasali Lingayat community protested at Channamma Circle on Monday demanding reservation in the 2A category.

Kudalasangama Panchamasali Peeth seer Basava Jaya Mruthyunjaya Swami, speaking at the protest, warned the district administration that if an alternative location for the demonstration was not provided, they would block the national highway on Tuesday. "The district administration assured us of an alternate location. If they fail to deliver, we will escalate our protests," the seer said.

Following the protest at Channamma Circle, the community members continued their dharna at Gandhi Bhavan, a private location. Swamiji expressed the community's anger over the lathi charge on protesters near Suvarna Vidhan Soudha and declared that the indefinite strike would continue until Chief Minister Siddaramaiah apologized for the incident.

Swamiji also called for the withdrawal of Siddaramaiah's statement in the Legislative Council, where he termed the demand for 2A reservation by the Panchamasali community as "unconstitutional." The seer demanded the removal of the statement from the house proceedings. *—Salar News*

Govt assures quota for Madigas in 3 months

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

Social Welfare Minister H.C. Mahadevappa assured the Madiga community on Monday that the Karnataka government is committed to implementing the Justice Sadashiva Commission's report on internal reservation within three months.

Addressing a convention organized by the Madiga community at Malini City, Mahadevappa emphasized the government's dedication to following the Supreme Court's order to provide internal reservation for the community.

Mahadevappa noted that the Madiga community has been fighting for internal reservation for the past 30 years, and praised states like Haryana and Telangana for taking steps towards its implementation. He confirmed that Karnataka has set up a committee, chaired by Justice Nagamohan Das, to guide the process.

The minister assured that the government would prevent violence in the struggle for internal reservation, calling threats of a "blood revolution" mere emotional statement.

The convention was led by former Union Minister A. Narayanaswamy and Basavamoorti Madar Channayya Swamiji of Chitradurga's Madara Channayya Peetha. Thousands of community leaders and activists participated in the event, where Narayanaswamy highlighted the persistent issues faced by oppressed communities even after 75 years of independence. *—Salar News*

Govt tables ₹5K cr supplement demand

BELAGAVI, 16 DEC

The State government on Monday tabled the second installment of supplementary estimate for the current fiscal aggregating to Rs 5,317.83 crore.

The supplementary estimate includes Rs 16.28 crore of 'charged expenditure and voted expenditure of Rs 5,301.55 crore'. "Of that, Rs 2304.95 crore is met out of the Reserve Funds which also needs to be voted," the introductory note said.

"Net outgo from the Consolidated Fund is Rs 3,012.88 crore. A sum of Rs, 1,199.94 crore is covered by Central Assistance. Hence, net cash out go is Rs 1,812.94 crore," it added.

The government said this amount will be met from revenue receipts of state and if necessary, through reprioritisation of expenditure and probable savings in expenditure and borrowings. *—PTI*

Darshan visits court to sign bail bond

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

Kannada actor Darshan, who has been granted interim bail by the Karnataka High Court in the murder of one of his fans from Chitradurga district, on Monday appeared before the Sessions Court in the state capital to complete bail formalities.

Darshan was accompanied by his wife Vijayalakshmi and fellow actor Dhanveer.

Darshan, who had been admitted to BGS Hospital in Kengeri with severe back pain for over six weeks, left the hospital on Monday following medical advice to sign the surety bond. No surgical procedure was performed on him during his hospital stay.

YELAHANKA AT 225%

Bengaluru's groundwater extraction rate 150%: Jal Shakti Ministry

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Delhi's groundwater resources are heavily strained, with the overall extraction rate at 99.13 per cent, categorised as "critical", while the situation in Bengaluru is even more alarming with the overall groundwater extraction rate at 150.84 per cent, the Jal Shakti ministry said on Monday.

Responding to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Jal Shakti, Raj Bhushan Choudhary, said that while desalination technology using reject heat from nuclear reactors is operational at Kalpakkam, Tamil Nadu, it is not widely applicable.

Instead, the reverse osmosis (RO) membrane technology is deemed suitable for treating groundwater, the minister said.

PHOTO: PTI

The government has also assessed groundwater dynamics in urban areas like Delhi and Bengaluru, but similar data for Mumbai is unavailable due to insufficient data collection.

Yelahanka emerged as the most stressed region, extracting over 225 per cent of its available groundwater resource. Other urban areas, including Bangalore North, East, and South, recorded overextraction rates exceeding 200 per cent.

Bengaluru City itself reported an extraction rate of 217.4 per cent. The minister also emphasised that advanced desalination and groundwater recharge technologies could play a role in water conservation, but their scalability is constrained by infrastructure and feasibility challenges. *—PTI*

MAN ENDS LIFE, ACCUSES WIFE OF INFIDELITY

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

Just days after the suicide of a techie in the City, a 41-year-old man, Balaraj, took his own life in Hesaraghatta, leaving behind a note accusing his wife of infidelity and harassment.

Balaraj, a resident of Silvepura in Bengaluru North, had been married to Kumari for 18 years, following a separation from his first wife. According to Soladevanahalli police, the couple had frequent arguments over minor issues. On Saturday, Balaraj and his wife had a heated argument, after which she left to stay with her parents. Authorities believe Balaraj took the step on Sunday while alone at home. *Suicide is not the solution. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416, SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.* *—Salar News*

Sait family encroached Waqf land: BJP MLC

MYSURU, 16 DEC

Former BJP MLC G Madhusudhana on Monday accused former minister and Congress MLA Tanveer Sait and his family of encroaching on government land in Mysuru.

Madhusudhana said the Sait family, including his father and former minister Aziz Sait, along with partners such as Taj Mohammed Khan has encroached on Waqf land in different parts of the city, including on Akbar Road and Sayyaji Rao Road.

The MLC alleged that during 2011, nearly 40,000 acres of Waqf land worth Rs 2.39 lakh crore was encroached by influential Muslim community leaders in the state. The list includes Rehaman Khan, NA Harris, late Jaffer Sharief, Roshan Baig, Azeez Sait and CM Ibrahim, he said.

Madhusudhana also accused Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, AICC leader Mallikarjuna Kharge and other Congress leaders of protecting the encroachers of Waqf properties.

"With the implementation of guarantees like schemes emptying state coffers, the Congress government should auction all encroached on Waqf properties and distribute the money among the poor", he said. The BJP leader also alleged that the Asia Mall land in Kalaburgi belongs to the Kharge family. Referring on BJP's silence during its tenure on Waqf land encroachments, he said that his party did not raise the issue because of several related cases remaining pending before various courts. *—Salar News*

Doval to visit China for key talks on border truce

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

National Security Advisor Ajit Doval is likely to travel to Beijing within the next few weeks to lead the Indian delegation at a new edition of the Special Representatives dialogue on the larger boundary question that will be held after a gap of nearly five years, authoritative sources said. The last round of Special Representatives (SR) dialogue took place in New Delhi in December 2019. The decision to revive the dialogue mechanism was taken at a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Kazan on 23 October. NSA Doval is travelling to China soon to attend the 23 round of SR talks, the sources said. *—PTI*

Senior JMM leader Vijay Kumar Singh dies at 78

DUMKA, 16 DEC

Senior JMM leader Vijay Kumar Singh died at a private hospital in Dumka on Monday morning following a prolonged illness. He was 78. Singh, an advocate by profession, was the general secretary of JMM's central committee and the chief convenor of the party in the Santhal Parganas division. A large number of people paid homage to him after the body was taken to his residence at Kumharpada in Dumka. Chief Minister Hemant Soren said, "I am deeply saddened by the news of demise of respected Baba's movement companion, senior advocate, pillar of JMM family and my guardian respected Shri Vijay Singh ji". *—PTI*

UP minister Ashish alleges plot to murder him

LUCKNOW, 16 DEC

Senior Apna Dal (Soneylal) leader and Uttar Pradesh Technical Education Minister Ashish Patel has alleged that a conspiracy is being hatched to "murder" him politically over reported irregularities in the promotion of teachers. Patel also said that the day the prime minister orders, he will resign from his post as minister without a second's delay. The minister's reaction came amid allegations that more than 100 lecturers in the technical education department were promoted in violation of reservation norms. In another post, the minister said, "For the fight for social justice, @ApnaDalOfficial became a part of NDA in 2014 under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji and in the presence of Hon'ble Home Minister Shri @AmitShah ji. The day Honourable Prime Minister orders, I will resign from the post of minister without even a second's delay." *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Bees attack Odisha Cong activists during protest

BHUBANESWAR, 16 DEC

Several members of the youth wing of the Congress were seen fleeing in panic to escape an attack by a swarm of bees during a protest here on Monday. Holding party flags and banners, the youth Congress activists took out a protest march to gherao the residence of senior IAS officer Bishnupada Sethi here over his alleged involvement in a corruption case, which is under investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Notably, the CBI on 10 December issued a summons to Sethi, the principal secretary of ST&SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare Department in connection with a Rs 10 lakh bribery case. Sethi also holds the additional charge as principal secretary of Social Security and Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities Department. *—PTI*

PM must say sorry: Cong on Nehru row

Kharge says PM tweaked facts

LoP in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge speaks in the House during the Winter session, in New Delhi, on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha and Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of misleading the country by "twisting facts" about Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's letter on reservation to states and demanded an apology.

Participating in a discussion on 'Glorious Journey of 75 years of the Constitution of India' in the Upper House, Kharge also accused the BJP leaders of indulging in 'bhakti' of Prime Minister Modi, asserting that it was leading the country towards dictatorship.

Kharge also said that it was because of the policies brought by the Congress that women reservation became a reality. He assured that if in power they would implement reservation for women in Parliament and state assemblies faster than the BJP.

He alleged that BJP was against reservation and that is why the party is against caste census.

He claimed that before coming to power, the BJP had promised to give Rs 15 lakh in every bank account, 2 crore jobs every year, provide MSP and double farmers' income.

Kharge countered Modi for a speech during which he had claimed there was no elected government between 1947-1952 when Congress had illegally amended Constitution. *—PTI*

'WILL WEAR WHAT I WANT'

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra Monday carried a bag to Parliament that had 'Palestine' emblazoned on it. Congress general secretary has been raising her voice against Israel's actions in Gaza and expressing solidarity with Palestinians. Amid backlash from BJP, she said that, 'I will wear what I want to, will not subscribe to patriarchy' **PHOTO: PTI**

In RS: FM dubs Cong 'anti-women'

Accuses Cong of dynasty politics

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

In a no-holds-barred attack on the Congress in the Rajya Sabha, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday accused the grand old party of carrying out major amendments to the Constitution "brazenly to help the family and the dynasty".

She also alleged that it was "anti-woman" for failing to get the women's reservation bill passed when it was in power.

Initiating the discussion on the 'Glorious Journey of 75 Years of the Constitution of India' in the Rajya Sabha, the senior BJP leader said the economic policies of the previous Congress governments for about 50 years did not strengthen India's economy and restricted growth.

She noted that the living document -- the Constitution -- has faced many amendments in the last seven decades.

In her nearly 80-minute speech, she mentioned various amendments to the Constitution during the era of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, which were aimed at strengthening the "family" and failed on the other tests of economic and social good besides constitutional spirit and processes.

"Each time the Congress brazenly (amended Constitution), only to help the family. The dynasty kept amending the Constitution, and this is how far they went even if it affects any particular woman who desperately needed the benefit," she alleged while referring to Shah Bano case. *—PTI*

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman **PHOTO: PTI**

Allies isolate Cong on EVM row

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

After Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and National Conference (NC) leader Omar Abdullah's dismissal of objections raised by Congress leaders against EVMs, Trinamool Congress (TMC) said that there was nothing substantial in the allegations of EVM manipulation.

TMC MP and party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee told reporters that his "personal opinion was that those raising questions on EVMs should show a demo of its discrepancies to the Election Commission (EC)". "They should show any video to the EC. The EC even called everyone. I have been conducting elections on the ground for a long time. If someone works well during EVM randomisation and the booth workers check EVMs during mock polls or review form 17C, which is used to check ballot units or control units, during counting of votes, I don't think there is anything substantial in these allegations (of EVM manipulation)," Banerjee said at the Parliament complex Monday.

TMC MP and party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee **PHOTO: PTI**

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis urged the Congress Party to reflect on its election defeats rather than casting blame on EVMs. Speaking to reporters, Fadnavis stated that Congress would continue to face electoral losses unless it undertakes serious introspection. His comments came as the winter session of the state legislature commenced, with opposition members staging a protest against Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs).

Echoing this sentiment, Union Minister Pralhad Joshi emphasised that blaming EVMs would not rectify Congress's shortcomings.

The debate over EVM reliability continues, with some members of the opposition, including the Samajwadi Party, maintaining their long-standing opposition to the technology. *—PTI*

IN MANIPUR

7 militants held for killing migrants

IMPHAL, 16 DEC

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh has announced the arrest of seven members of a militant outfit in relation to the recent killings of two migrant labourers from Bihar. The construction workers, aged 18 and 17, were shot dead in Kakching district on Saturday evening, sparking outrage. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has expressed his condolences and announced an ex gratia payment of Rs 2 lakh for each family of the victims.

Singh stated, "We strongly suspect politically motivated groups are behind the killings. Their interrogation is underway to ascertain their involvement. We will definitely find the culprits." He also condemned the incident as an "act of terrorism" and indicated a larger conspiracy to destabilise Manipur may be at play.

Manipur Chief Minister Biren Singh **PHOTO: PTI**

In response to the tragic events, Singh announced an increased ex gratia payment of Rs 10 lakh for the bereaved families. He emphasised ongoing efforts to identify and prosecute those responsible, and mentioned that the case may be handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) if necessary.

On a separate note, security forces in Kangpokpi district seized a substantial cache of arms and ammunition, including rifles, pistols, grenades, and explosives, highlighting ongoing security concerns in the region.

The brutal killing of the migrant workers has raised significant alarm and calls for unity against violence in the state. *—PTI*

T'gana Assembly adjourned amid protests by BRS

HYDERABAD, 16 DEC

Amid sloganeering by Opposition BRS MLAs against the Congress government, the Telangana Assembly was adjourned for the day on Monday without completing a debate on tourism policy.

When the House resumed after a tea break, Speaker G Prasad Kumar took up a short discussion on 'Telangana State Tourism Policy', but the opposition party members kept raising slogans against the Congress dispensation.

Taking exception to the BRS legislators allegedly not following the rules and traditions of the House, Legislative Affairs Minister D Sridhar Babu said the government is ready to respond to any issue raised by the opposition members.

PHOTO: ANI

The Speaker directed BRS MLAs to hand over the pamphlets to the marshals and disapproved of them raising slogans and displaying placards inside the House.

Tourism Minister Jupally Krishna Rao began his speech, but BRS MLAs continued to raise slogans. *—PTI*

M'rashtra tables ₹33K cr supplementary demands

NAGPUR, 16 DEC

Maharashtra government on Monday tabled supplementary demands of Rs 33,788.40 crore, with a provision of Rs 1,400 crore for the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin scheme.

Minister Uday Samant tabled these supplementary demands, which are additional funds sought by the government over allocations.

In the last budget, the state government announced Rs 46,000 crore annually to provide a monthly allowance of Rs 1,500 to eligible women in the age group of 21 to 60 years under the Ladki Bahin scheme. More than 2.5 crore women have received the monthly instalments.

Mahayuti allies to do 'performance audit' of ministers

Uday Samant **PHOTO: PTI**

Fadnavis has said the Mahayuti allies have agreed to conduct a "performance audit" of ministers during their tenure.

While Fadnavis has not mentioned any timeline, Deputy CM and Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde said the ministers of his party will get two-and-a-half years and those who perform will progress. *—PTI*

CABINET SNUB SPARKS SENA MLA'S EXIT

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

Shiv Sena MLA Narendra Bhondekar has resigned from all party posts while expressing disappointment at not being included in the Maharashtra cabinet.

Speaking to reporters in Bhandara on Sunday, Bhondekar, who was the Shiv Sena's deputy leader and co-ordinator for eastern Vidarbha districts, claimed his party head and Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde had promised him a cabinet berth.

Bhondekar said he aspired to secure a cabinet berth to become the guardian minister of Bhandara district and work for its development.

> **Upset about exclusion from new Mahayuti cabinet; will decide future cours**
>
> -Chhagan Bhujbal, NCP leader

The Sena leader claimed his name was also considered for a ministerial position during the last cabinet expansion (of the previous Mahayuti government). *—PTI*

ONOE BILL SAYS

'Assembly poll cannot be held with LS poll'

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

The bill which seeks to put in place a mechanism to hold simultaneous elections in the country has a provision for situations when election to an assembly cannot be held with those of Parliament.

The constitution amendment bill, which is expected to be brought in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, said the president can issue an order that polls of an assembly which cannot go to elections with the Lok Sabha can go for the democratic exercise later.

According to section 2 sub clause 5 of the Constitution (129th) Amendment Bill, "If the Election Commission is of the opinion that the elections to any Legislative Assembly cannot be conducted along with the general election to the House of the People, it may make a recommendation to the President, to declare by an order, that the election to that Legislative Assembly may be conducted at a later date."

The tenure of Lok Sabha will be 5 years from appointed date **PHOTO: PTI**

It also provides that after its enactment, a notification is to be issued by the President on the date of the first sitting of the Lok Sabha after a general election, and that date of the notification will be called the appointed date.

The tenure of the Lok Sabha will be five years from that appointed date.

The tenure of all state assemblies, constituted by elections to the Legislative Assemblies after the appointed date and before the expiry of the full term of House, shall come to an end on expiry of the full term of the Lok Sabha. *—PTI*

> **INDIA will resist the anti-federal & impractical 'One nation one election' as it will push the country into the perils of unitary form of governance, killing its diversity and democracy in the process**
>
> -MK Stalin, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister

Will defend B'desh monk despite threats: Lawyer

KOLKATA, 16 DEC

Rabindra Ghosh, a prominent Bangladeshi lawyer representing jailed Hindu monk Chinmoy Krishna Das, has vowed to continue his fight for justice despite receiving life threats. Ghosh alleges that the interim government in Bangladesh is targeting Das due to his vocal opposition to atrocities against Hindus and his efforts to unite the minority community.

Speaking from Barrackpore where he is seeking medical treatment, the 74-year-old lawyer from the Bangladesh Supreme Court stated, "I have fought against injustice throughout my life. Death will come one day, but I will not be deterred." Ghosh's concerns follow Das's arrest at Dhaka's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, where he was en route to a rally. Denied bail, Das has been remanded in custody until 2 January.

Ghosh highlighted growing unrest among minority communities, noting that Hindu lawyers were assaulted while representing Das in court. He condemned the administration's inaction against rising fundamentalism, emphasising that the situation for Hindus has deteriorated since the current regime took power.

Reflecting on the 1971 Liberation War, Ghosh lamented that ongoing abuses against minorities contradict the principles for which they fought. He recalled the significant sacrifices made by Hindus during the war and expressed deep disappointment with the state of minority rights in contemporary Bangladesh. *—PTI*

6 dead, 7 injured in Chhattisgarh truck accident

CHHATTISGARH, 16 DEC

Six people were killed and seven others injured when a sports utility vehicle (SUV) they were travelling in collided with a truck in Chhattisgarh's Balod district, police said on Monday. A truck collided with a SUV near Daundi police station, killing six of the 13 occupants and injuring seven others. The victims were returning from a family function when the SUV collided with a truck. The deceased were Durpat Prajapati, 30, Sumitra Bai Kumbhkar, 50, Manisha Kumbhkar, 35, Sagun Bai Kumbhkar, 50, Imla Bai, 55 and a minor boy Jignesh Kumbhkar, 7. An accidental death report has been registered and further investigation is underway. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Smoke in coach triggers panic on UP express train

UTTAR PRADESH, 16 DEC

Passengers onboard an express train travelling from Chhapra to Mathura experienced a near-panic situation here on Monday morning when smoke emanated from a coach due to a jammed brake. The incident occurred on the 22531 Mathura SF Express between Gauri Bazar and Baitalpur railway stations where the train was halted, and the issue was promptly resolved by the guard and driver before it resumed its journey with a delay of about 30 minutes, officials said. A train stopped due to smoke in one of its coaches, causing a jammed brake. The driver and guard repaired the brake, causing the smoke. No passengers were injured. The train departed safely, causing a half-an-hour delay. Gauri Bazar station master Bharat Kumar confirmed the incident. *—PTI*

Maharashtra BEST bus accident toll rises to 8

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

A 55-year-old man, who was among the several persons injured in the BEST bus accident in Kurla area here, died on Monday morning, taking the death toll to eight, a civic official said. The electric bus, hired by the civic-run Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking on wet-lease basis, ploughed into a crowd and fatally knocked down seven persons and injured 42 others on a crowded road in Kurla area on 9 December. Several vehicles were also damaged in the incident. One of the injured persons, identified as Fazlu Rehman, died during treatment. BEST has set up a five-member committee to investigate the Kurla accident. Driver Sanjay More, 54, is in police custody for alleged reckless driving. *—PTI*

Those giving alms to beggers will be booked in Indore

INDORE, 16 DEC

In a bid to make Indore in Madhya Pradesh free of beggars, the district authorities on Monday said the administration will start registering FIRs from 1 January, 2025 against those who give alms. The administration has already issued an order banning begging in Indore, district collector Ashish Singh told reporters. Indore is launching an awareness campaign against begging until December, with a First Information Report (FIR) being registered for anyone found giving alms from 1 January. The administration has exposed gangs involved in begging and many have been rehabilitated. The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is launching a pilot project to eradicate begging in 10 cities, by promoting a campaign to discourage residents from participating in the act. *—PTI*

3 damaged idols found after Sambhal temple reopening

Citizens allowed to visit under increased security

SAMBHAL, 16 DEC

Three idols were found inside the well of the Bhasma Shankar temple in Sambhal that was reopened after being shut for 46 years, officials said on Monday.

The Shri Kartik Mahadev Temple (Bhasma Shankar temple) was reopened on December 13, after the authorities said they stumbled upon the covered structure during an anti-encroachment drive.

The temple housed an idol of Lord Hanuman and a Shivling. It had remained locked since 1978. The temple also has a well nearby, which the authorities had planned to reopen.

District Magistrate of Sambhal Rajender Pensiya said the ancient temple and the well were being excavated. "Around 10 to 12 feet of digging has been done. Today, first an idol of Parvati was found with its head broken. Then Ganesh and Lakshmi idols were found," he added.

Asked if the idols were damaged and then put inside, he said, "All this is a matter of investigation."

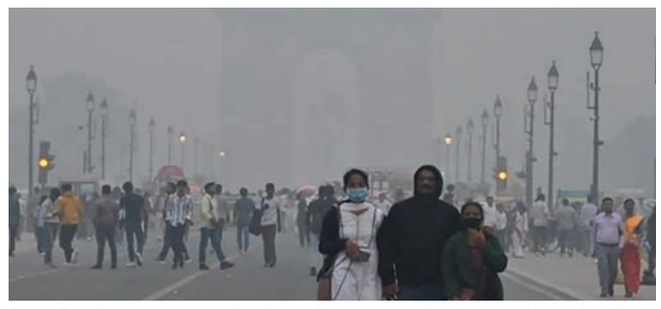
"Right now, these idols have come out. How did they get inside, what happened, and what did not happen will be known after a detailed investigation," Pensiya said.

The district magistrate said some people removed encroachments on their own while others have been requested to remove them. Due process will be followed through the municipal corporation, he said. Further due process will be followed and then these will be removed through the nagar palika, he said. Asked if the temple would also be beautified, Pensiya said, "First the temple's 'praacheentaa' will be ensured." The district administration has written to the Archaeological Survey of India for carbon dating of the temple, including the well. Carbon dating is a method used to determine the age of archaeological artefacts from ancient sites.

Worshippers have started visiting the temple and it is being guarded round the clock. Meanwhile, BJP's Sambhal district unit chief Chaudhary Harendra Singh, who offered prayers, told reporters that "there is enthusiasm in the Hindu society due to the opening of the temple".

"Today I performed puja and read Hanuman Chalisa for which I would like to thank the administration. Just like the opposition, we also want the truth of Sambhal to come before the whole country. People should know how Hindus migrated from Sambhal," Singh said. *—PTI*

Security personnel inside a temple that was reopened after 46 years, at Khaggu Sarai area in Sambhal district, Saturday. ***PHOTO: PTI***



Amid Delhi's poor air quality students and parents will have the option to choose online education wherever it is available ***PHOTO: X***

GRAP III curbs back in Delhi as air quality worsens

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

The Centre's air quality panel for Delhi-NCR Monday invoked restrictive measures under stage three of the air pollution control plan amid a sharp dip in air quality due to unfavourable meteorological conditions.

Delhi's AQI stood at 367 at 2pm. Poor air quality, caused by unfavourable weather conditions, often persists from November to January.

"Considering the highly unfavourable meteorological conditions including calm winds and very low mixing height leading the AQI of Delhi into the higher end of the very poor category, the panel's sub-committee on Graded Response Action Plan decides to impose stage 3 of the revised GRAP schedule (issued on Friday) in the entire NCR, with immediate effect," an official order said.

According to the revised plan, schools and colleges in Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, and Gautam Budh Nagar are mandatorily required to shift classes up to Class V to hybrid mode under GRAP Stage III.

Students and parents will have the option to choose online education wherever it is available.

Stage 3 also entails a ban on non-essential diesel-operated medium goods vehicles with BS-IV or older standards within Delhi.

Non-essential diesel light commercial vehicles of BS-IV or older standards, registered outside Delhi, are also not allowed to enter the city.

Previously, such restrictions were applicable only to BS-III vehicles.

Persons with disabilities are exempt from restrictions imposed on BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel cars in Delhi and the districts of Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, and Gautam Budh Nagar under stage III. *—PTI*

VIJAY DIWAS

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh pays homage at the National War Memorial on the occasion of the Vijay Diwas, marking India's victory in the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, in New Delhi, on Monday ***PHOTO: PTI***

Docs advise hospitalisation for farmer leader on indefinite fast

CHANDIGARH, 16 DEC

Doctors checking on Punjab farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, whose hunger strike entered its 21st day on Monday, have recommended immediate hospitalisation due to his deteriorating health. However, he has refused to receive any medical treatment.

The 70-year-old Dallewal, a cancer patient, has been on a fast-unto-death at the Khanauri border point between Punjab and Haryana to press the Centre to accept the agitating farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of MSP on crops.

Jagjit Singh Dallewal ***PHOTO: PTI***

Sharing details about Dallewal's health, Dr Avtar Singh said, "As per test reports, the creatinine level is increasing and GFR (glomerular filtration rate) is dropping. Ketones are also on a higher side which means his condition is quite bad."

Dr Singh, who is part of a team of doctors from the 5 Rivers Heart Association, an NGO, said Dallewal has not eaten anything. He is just drinking water, the doctor said.Dr Singh said Dallewal has turned so weak that he could not stand on his own and required support. A few days ago, his blood pressure was recorded in the range of 80/50 which is not a good sign, he said.

"There is a possibility of cardiac arrest," he further said.

Doctors have installed medical equipment at the protest site to monitor the vitals of Dallewal. *—PTI*

RG Kar docs announce protest after 2 get bail

KOLKATA, 16 DEC

The West Bengal Joint Platform of Doctors (WBJPD) is organising a sit-in demonstration in the heart of Kolkata from Tuesday over the CBI investigation into the RG Kar hospital rape and murder case, in which two key suspects were granted bail.

The proposed demonstration of the WBJPD, an umbrella organisation of five associations, will be held till 26 December at the Doreena Crossing, an office-bearer said. "We also demand the immediate submission of the supplementary chargesheet by the CBI," said doctor Punyabrata Gun, a joint convener of WBJPD. He said the organisation has written to Kolkata Police Commissioner, seeking permission for the demonstration. "We have sought permission to set up a temporary stage without any interruption to the traffic movement. We have assured them that the demonstration will be conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner, following all legal and safety guidelines," Gun said. *—PTI*

'CHEMICAL CASTRATION BARBARIC'

SC mulls pan-India rules on women's safety

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

The Supreme Court agreed on Monday to examine a plea seeking direction for framing pan-India guidelines to provide a safe environment for women, children and transgender persons in society.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan issued notice to different ministries of the Centre and its instrumentalities and posted the matter for further hearing in January. Senior advocate Mahalakshmi Pawani, appearing for the petitioner Supreme Court Women Lawyers Association, said several incidents of sexual abuse against women are taking place in smaller cities, which are going unreported and pushed under the carpet.

The bench said it will not entertain many of the prayers mentioned in the petition as they are "barbaric" and "harsh" but there are some issues that are very innovative and need to be examined.

Justice Surya Kant said the question of maintaining proper behaviour in public transport is one of the issues worth consideration and awareness needs to be created on how one should behave in buses, metros and trains.

The do's and don'ts in public utility vehicles need to be publicised, he said. *—PTI*

Protesting students lathicharged in Ranchi

Police detain a student during a protest in Ranchi, Jharkhand on Monday ***PHOTO: PTI***

RANCHI, 16 DEC

Police resorted to lathicharge to disperse agitating candidates, who assembled near the Jharkhand Staff Service Commission (JSSC) office on Monday to protest alleged malpractices in a recruitment examination held in September.

Jharkhand State Students' Union leader Devendra Nath Mahto, who was leading the protest, was also detained by the police.

Prohibitory orders were iimposed under Section 163 of BNS within the 500-metre radius of the SSC office from 5.30am on Saturday to 8pm on 20 December. Students staged a peaceful demonstration near the JSSC office, while prohibitory orders were imposed 500m away. A student claimed they didn't break any laws, but police used lathicharge and took away their leader Devendra Nath Mahto after beating him. *—PTI*

TM Krishna not awarded Subbulakshmi honour: SC

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

The Supreme Court on Monday said carnatic vocalist TM Krishna should not be recognised as the recipient of the MS Subbulakshmi award as an interim measure.A bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and S V N Bhatti passed the order on a plea filed by Subbulakshmi's grandson V Srinivasan, who alleged Krishna made scandalous remarks against the late singer.

"The court is mindful of the respect and honour that M S Subbulakshmi commands all across music lovers spreading across all spectrums. She is one of the most distinguished singers and although she passed away in December, 2004, her melodious voice continues to bring great joy to her fans," said the bench.

Before SC, Srinivasan challenged an order of the Madras High Court that set aside an interim injunction restraining the city-based music academy from conferring the award on Krishna.

The bench issued notice to Krishna, the music academy, The Hindu and THG Publishing Private Limited while seeking their replies within four weeks.

The order was passed after additional solicitor general N Venkataraman submitted it was an extraordinary matter as Krishna wrote articles allegedly maligning Subbulakshmi.

The late singer's grandson Srinivasan alleged since Krishna made "vile, vituperative and scandalous attacks" against his grandmother on social media and maligned her reputation, he should not be given the award. *—PTI*

'EVENT COULD BREACH PEACE'

US-based interfaith couple cancels wedding in Aligarh after Rightwing protest

ALIGARH, 16 DEC

A US-based inter-faith couple of Indian origin was forced to cancel their wedding reception in this Uttar Pradesh district following "threats of protests" by right-wing organisations, officials said on Monday.

The couple was married in March and registered it under the Special Marriage Act at an Indian consulate in the US. They had planned to host a reception for family members and friends at a hotel here on Saturday, their relatives said.

However, after the invitation card of the reception became circulated on social media, they faced stiff opposition from the Bajrang Bal, a Bajrang Dal splinter group, the All-India Karni Sena, and some BJP leaders.

PHOTO: X

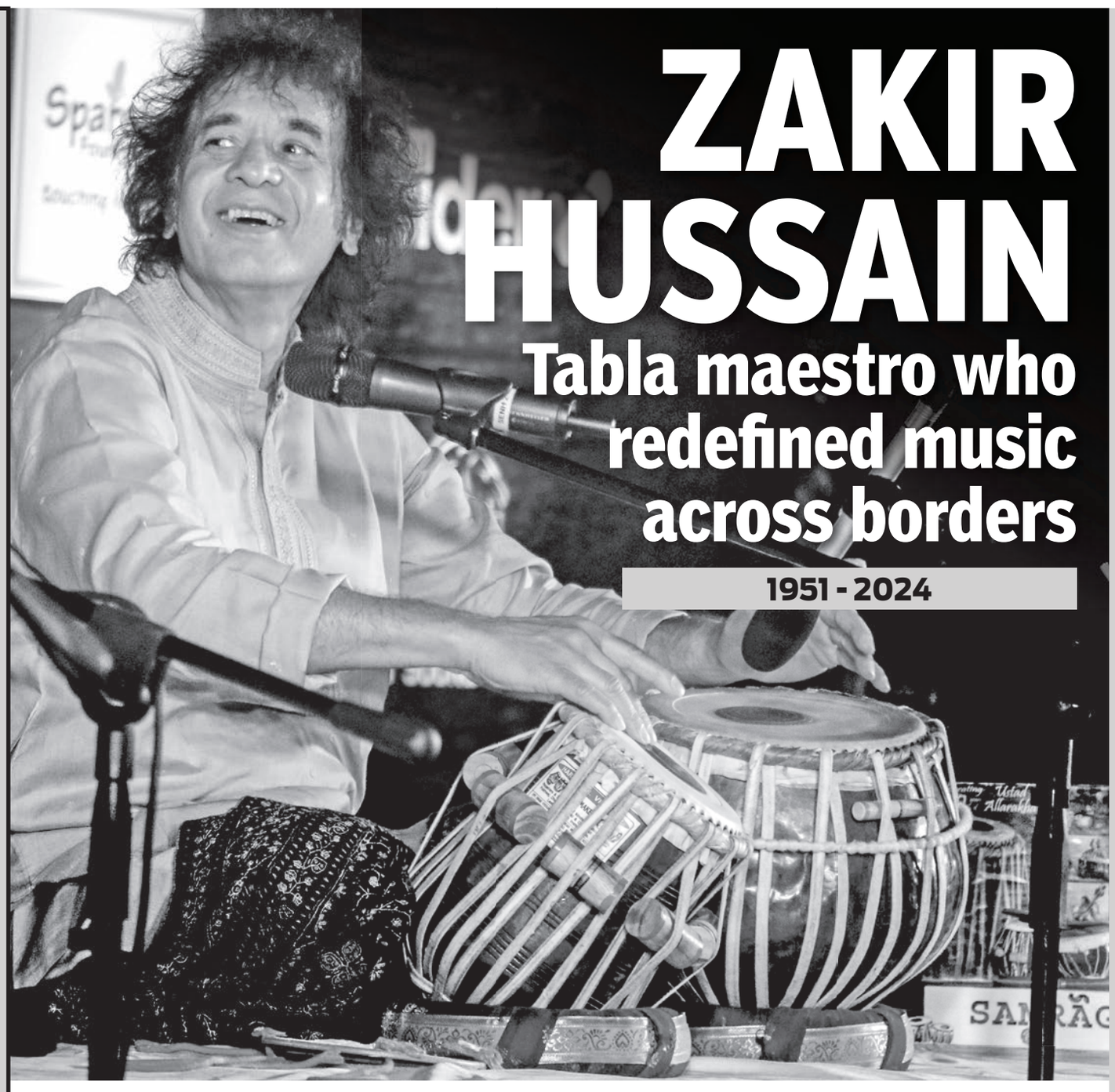
- Citing the alleged mistreatment of Hindus in Bangladesh and recent violence in Sambhal and Bharaich, the memorandum said the event could potentially breach peace in the city

On 12 December, the groups announced that they would hold protests against the event and also allegedly pressured the hotel management to cancel the booking.

The groups also approached Additional District Magistrate (City) Amit Kumar, expressing strong opposition to the event. They submitted a joint memorandum, signed by former Aligarh mayor Shakuntala Bharti and All India Karni Sena president Thakur Gyanendra Singh Chauhan, warning that it could lead to unrest.

Citing the alleged mistreatment of Hindus in Bangladesh and recent violence in Sambhal and Bharaich, the memorandum said the event could potentially breach peace in the city. Chauhan said the marriage was a "clear case of love jihad" and his organisation would firmly oppose the celebration.

The hotel management said it would comply with the district authorities' directives in the matter. Meanwhile, top district officials held discussions on 13 December but both families had decided to call off the function by the afternoon, citing "unforseen circumstances". *—PTI*



ZAKIR HUSSAIN

Tabla maestro who redefined music across borders

1951 - 2024

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

His fingers flew, fluttered and floated in quicksilver changes of raga and rhythm, drumming up music and magic. Zakir Hussain was the maestro of tabla, percussionist, composer and even actor – a legend who was India's very own and yet belonged to the world.

Hussain, who made the tabla more popular and recognisable to western audiences and was the founding member of the fusion group Shakti

Hussain died from 'idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis', a lung disease, in a San Francisco hospital early Monday. He was 73.

Considered the greatest tabla player of his generation, Hussain had a career that spanned six decades.

Through his long career, the percussionist was at the front of innovation and experimentation in fusing different sounds from different worlds. He collaborated with several renowned international and Indian artistes but it was his 1973 project Shakti with English guitarist John McLaughlin, violinist L Shankar and percussionist T H 'Vikku' Vinayakram that brought together In-dian classical music and elements of jazz in a hitherto-unknown fusion.

His groundbreaking work with Western musicians such as cellist Yo-Yo Ma, jazz musician Charles Lloyd, banjo player Bela Fleck, bassist Edgar Meyer, percussionist Mickey Hart and The Beatles' George Harrison brought Indian classical music to an international audience, cementing his status as a global cultural ambassador.

"The mindset as I was growing up tuned itself to the idea that music is music, it's not Indian music or that music, so when I actually started working with musicians who were non-Indian it seemed like a natural handshake," Hussain told PTI almost a year ago ahead of a performance in Goa.

As the son of Allah Rakha, one of the greatest tabla players of all time, Hussain was to the music born.

He started early. The child prodigy performed his first concert at the age of seven and began touring at 12. After completing his education in Mumbai, where he was born, he moved to the United States in 1970.

The borders melted away when it came to his music.

In February, Hussain became the first musician from India to receive three Grammys at the 66th Annual Grammy Awards in February for Best Global Music Album, Best Global Music Performance and Best Contemporary Instrumental Album.

At the 2024 Grammys, Hussain earned his first honour for best global music album for "This Moment" as part of the fusion music group Shakti, which includes founding member British guitarist John McLaughlin, as well as vocalist Shankar Mahadevan, violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan and percussionist Selvaganesh Vinayakram.

He later won two other awards for the best global music performance for 'Pashto' and best contemporary instrumental album for 'As We Speak', along with flautist Rakesh Chaurasia, American banjo player Bela Fleck and American bassist Edgar Meyer.

In January last year, the Shakti quintet reunited for a world tour in India to much excitement from fans.

Other than Shakti, Hussain also contributed to many groundbreaking collaborations, including Masters of Percussion, Planet Drum and Global Drum Project with Mickey Hart that was awarded the first-ever Grammy for Best World Music Album in 1992, Tabla Beat Science, Sangam with Charles Lloyd and Eric Harland, CrossCurrents with Dave Holland and Chris Potter, in trio with Béla Fleck and Edgar Meyer, and, most recently, with Herbie Hancock.

Hussain composed three concertos. His third, the first-ever concerto for tabla and orchestra, was premiered in India in September 2015, by the Symphony Orchestra of India, in Europe and the UK in 2016, and in the US in April, 2017.

The composer who travelled and performed all across the globe had reservations against performing at private gatherings and disliked latecomers. He was also very vocal in his views.

Then there was the man himself. His broad smile, boyish good looks and curly locks keeping rhythm with his fingers gave him a distinctive star persona that sometimes went beyond his music.

The percussionist was once voted the 'sexiest man' by women readers of the Indian magazine 'Gentleman' in 1994 in a competition against the likes of Amitabh Bachchan.

"The magazine team came to see me and wanted me to wear all these suits and jackets and Western clothes and feature on their cover. I think they were equally shocked and surprised that I won the greatest number of votes because they had assumed the winner would be Amitabh Bachchan," Hussain is quoted as saying by Kabir.

Besides his work as a tabla player, Hussain also composed music for many movies, including 'Manto' and 'Mr and Mrs Iyer'.

He also acted in the Merchant Ivory film production 'Heat and Dust', 'The Perfect Murder' and 'Saaz', opposite Shabana Azmi.

Hussain and Taj

In 1988, Hussain became a household name as the face of the Taj Mahal Tea brand.

In a 33-second TV commercial, the ustad was shown immersed in his tabla riyaaz, only to later sip on a cup of Taj tea. The voiceover, by the famous Harish Bhimani, would then compliment Hussain's skills saying "Wah Ustad, wah!". To which, the percussionist would reply: "Arre huzoor, wah Taj boliye!"

That "Wah Taj" became an oft used buzzword for many an occasion, and still remembered all these years later.

The same year, Hussain also shared screen space with his father Allah Rakha in the iconic national integration song "Mile Sur Mera Tumhara" which premiered on Doordarshan.

He is survived by his wife Antonia Minnecola and two daughters, Anisa Qureshi and Isabella Qureshi.

Apart from four Grammys, Hussain was the recipient of countless awards and honours, including Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, the USA's National Heritage Fellowship and Officier in France's Order of Arts and Letters.

As his countless fans bid farewell to the artiste who transcended boundaries, of music and of geography, and went too soon, many could only say – "Wah Ustad".

—PTI

I cannot believe this news. How can I believe god has called him so soon or that he was sick? I cannot even think about this. He only lived for his tabla, rhythm and melody

— Hariprasad Chaurasia, Flautist

Words fail me. I am completely devastated to hear about Zakir Bhai. Ustad Zakir Hussain was a phenomenon, one of the most loved musicians the world has ever known

— Amjad Ali Khan, Sarod maestro

It's an irreparable loss... He was the most famous Indian musician world over

— Wasifuddin Dagar, Classical vocalist

A great musician a great man a great friend Zakir saheb has left us . We tend to use this word rather casually and carelessly but here is someone who in its real meaning can be called a musical GENIUS

— Javed Akhtar, Veteran screenwriter-lyricist

Hussain was an inspiration and a towering personality who elevated tabla to global acclaim. I regret not being able to collaborate with him as much as we did decades ago, though we had planned an album together.

—AR Rahman, Music maestro

The King, in whose hands Rhythm became Magic, has left us... RIP my dearest Zakir. We will meet again

— John McLaughlin, Founding member, Shakti

Zakir Bhai! He left too soon. Yet we are grateful for the times he gave us and what he left behind in the form of his art. Goodbye and Thank you

— Kamal Haasan, Actor

I've never seen a rhythm artiste with so much musicality and there will never be one more like this. Either there will be knowledge or expertise... It is impossible for an artist to be born of this calibre or to have knowledge, expertise and stage presence. Tabla is never going to sound like this ever again.

— Shankar Mahadevan, Musician and Shakti member

MAJOR AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

1988 Padma Shri

1990 Sangeet Natak Akademi Award

1992 Grammy for Mickey Hart's 'Planet Drum' project

1999 National Heritage Fellowship from the US National Endowment for the Arts

2002 Padma Bhushan

2009 Grammy for 'Global Drum Project'

2017 Lifetime Achievement Award from San Francisco Jazz Center

2019 Fellow of the Sangeet Natak Akademi

2022 Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy

2023 Padma Vibhushan

2024 Three Grammys for 'Pashto', 'As We Speak', and 'Motion'

Clockwise from left: Ustad Zakir Hussain performs with sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar in New Delhi on 27 Feb, 1995; UK's ace fusion and Jazz guitarist John McLaughlin and Hussain (L) at the Gateway of India on 20 Jan, 2005; Hussain, Edgar Meyer and Rakesh Chaurasia accept the Global Music Performance award during the 66th Grammy Awards on 4 Feb, 2024; Hussain smiles as flautist Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia laughs after receiving the Padma Vibhushan in 2023; with Kathak exponent Birju Maharaj; Shakti members: Hussain, Shankar Mahadevan, John McLaughlin, Ganesh Rajagopalan, V Selvaganesh

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I MADE HIM THE TABLA, HE MADE MY LIFE: HUSSAIN'S TABLA MAKER

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

For Haridas Vhatkar, tabla making won't be the same again, as he mourns the passing away of his most celebrated customer, Ustad Zakir Hussain.

"I first began making tablas for his father Alla Rakha, and made tablas for Zakir Hussain saab since 1998," an emotional Vhatkar, 59, told PTI.

Speaking from his workshop at Kanjurmarg in Mumbai, Vhatkar said he last met the 73-year-old tabla maestro in August this year in Mumbai.

"He was very particular about what sort of tabla he wanted and when. He paid a lot of attention to the 'tuning' aspect of the musical instrument," said Vhatkar, a third generation tabla maker, hailing from Miraj in western Maharashtra.

"Innumerable," was Vhatkar's reply when asked how many tablas did he make for Zakir Hussain over the last two decades. He said he also has many tablas which were left behind for him by the tabla maestro.

"Besides making new instruments, I was also his sort of repair department for maintaining the collection of the older ones," said Vhatkar. "I made tablas for him and he made my life," the tabla maker added. *—PTI*

Haridas Vhatkar who used to make tabla for Ustad Zakir Hussian, at his workshop in Mumbai on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

WHEN BABY HUSSAIN HAD RHYTHMS FOR PRAYERS FROM DAD

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

Eight years ago, tabla maestro Zakir Hussain had narrated how his father Allah Rakha had welcomed him into this world by putting the musical instrument's rhythms into his ears when asked to recite prayers.

Zakir Hussain spoke of his father holding him in his arms for the first time. Allah Rakha was an accomplished tabla player and a frequent accompanist of iconic sitar player Pandit Ravi Shankar.

"I was brought home and handed over to my dad in his arms. The tradition was that the father is supposed to recite a prayer in the baby's ear, welcoming the baby and putting some good words.

"So he takes me in his arms, puts his lips to my ear and recites the tabla rhythms into my ears. My mother was livid. She said, what are you doing? You're supposed to say, you know, prayers, not rhythms. "And he said, but these are my prayers. This is how I pray. He said, I am the worshipper of Goddess Saraswati and Lord Ganesh. This was a devout Muslim talking. He said this is the knowledge he got from his teachers and wanted to pass it on to his son," Zakir Hussain said. *—PTI*

7-day polio drive begins in Pak amid tight security

PESHAWAR, 16 DEC

A week-long polio eradication campaign across Pakistan began on Monday amid tight security to ensure its smooth sailing against the crippling disease that saw a surge this year with 63 cases reported so far. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), Pakistan and Afghanistan remain the only countries where the paralysing virus is still rampant. During the campaign, more than 44.7 million children under the age of five will be vaccinated. The campaign has started across 143 districts of the country to prevent the resurgence of the polio virus. *—PTI*

Fiji: 7 tourists hospitalised after drinking cocktails

WELLINGTON, 16 DEC

Seven foreigners were hospitalised in Fiji after drinking cocktails at a resort bar, Fijian authorities said on Monday. The cause of their illness was not known and officials said it was too soon to know if tainted alcohol was involved. The group at the five-star Warwick resort near the town of Sigatoka on Saturday included Australians and an American, according to local news reports. They were hospitalised with nausea, vomiting and neurological symptoms, said Jemesa Tudravu, a Fiji Health Ministry spokesperson. All seven remained in Lautoka Hospital in stable condition on Monday, Fiji's Tourism Minister Viliame R Gavoka said in a statement. Local news outlets reported on Sunday that the cause of the foreigners' illness was suspected alcohol poisoning, similar to a case in Laos in November in which six tourists — including two Australian teenagers — died after consuming tainted drinks. *—PTI*

UK approves $3.78B Royal Mail takeover

YOGYAKARTA, 16 DEC

The UK government has approved the USD 3.78 billionsale of Royal Mail's parent company to Czech billionaire Daniel Kretinsky's EP Group, following "legally binding" commitments. The government will retain a "golden share," ensuring it approves any major changes to Royal Mail's ownership, HQ location, and tax residency. EP Group is required to maintain the Universal Service Obligation (USO), mandating six-day letter deliveries and five-day parcel services. Kretinsky pledged to honour the USO "for as long as I am alive," though Royal Mail proposed reducing second-class deliveries to alternate weekdays, saving Euro 300 million annually. EP Group aims to modernise Royal Mail. *—Agencies*

PHOTO: PTI

2 teens killed, 4 injured in US shooting

HOUSTON, 16 DEC

Two teens were killed and four were injured — including a 13-year-old girl — in a shooting at a makeshift club in Houston, police said Sunday. Officers arriving at the site of the shooting late Saturday night found "a very hectic scene — a large crowd of people running out of a makeshift club," Assistant Chief Luis Menendez-Sierra said at a news conference. Police have not yet identified a suspect and have asked those who were at the event to call police with any information. Police said some witnesses told detectives that they saw a man wearing all black, including a hooded sweatshirt and a black mask covering his face, shoot a pistol into a crowd of people. *—PTI*

ISRAEL HITS SYRIAN MISSILE WAREHOUSES

US embassy in Damascus issued advisory for American citizens to leave Syria

JERUSALEM, 16 DEC

A UK-based war monitor has reported that Israeli airstrikes early on Monday hit missile warehouses in Syria, describing the attacks as the "most violent strikes" in the coastal region since 2012.

In the aftermath of President Bashar Assad's regime collapse, Israel has intensified its bombardment of what it claims are military sites in Syria. The disintegration of Assad's control has led to the destruction of much of the Syrian air defence system and the bulk of the former Syrian army's military arsenal. Israeli forces have also established control over a border buffer zone, igniting controversy and drawing accusations from critics who argue that Israel is contravening the 1974 ceasefire agreement while potentially exploiting the upheaval in Syria for territorial gain.

The Assad family's rule, which spanned over five decades, unraveled just over a week ago due to a surprising advance by rebel forces.

Despite having been defeated in March 2019, sleeper cells of the IS group have been blamed for a series of deadly attacks in various parts of Syria **PHOTO: PTI**

This turn of events has heightened concerns about increasing regional instability, especially as the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza shows no signs of resolution.

Tensions also continue between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, despite a ceasefire.

The new Syrian administration, emerging from the ranks of insurgents who ousted Assad, has lodged complaints with the UN Security Council regarding Israeli airstrikes and incursions into Syrian territory in the Golan Heights. Nonetheless, they have expressed a desire to avoid military confrontation with Israel.

In a related development, the US embassy in Damascus has issued an advisory for American citizens to leave Syria, citing a volatile and unpredictable security situation characterised by armed conflict and terrorism across the country.

The embassy, closed since 2012, urged those unable to depart to formulate contingency plans. They further stated that the U.S. government is incapable of providing routine or emergency consular services and advised those needing assistance to contact the embassy in the nearest country they plan to enter.

Despite having been defeated in March 2019, sleeper cells of the IS group have been blamed for a series of deadly attacks in various parts of Syria in recent months, underscoring the ongoing threats that persist in the war-torn nation. *—PTI*

20 killed in Israel's attack on Gaza school

GAZA, 16 DEC

Israeli forces bombed another United Nations-run school in southern Gaza, killing at least 20 displaced Palestinians sheltering in the building, on Monday.

More than 60 people were confirmed dead as a result of Israeli attacks in the last 24 hours, according to Palestinian officials.

Israel's war in Gaza has killed 45,028 Palestinians and wounded 106,962 since 7 October, 2023, Gaza's Ministry of Health said on Monday. Health officials in the Gaza Strip say the death toll from the 14-month war between Israel and Hamas militants has topped 45,000 people. Israel says it has killed more than 17,000 militants, without providing evidence. *—Agencies*

Scholz loses confidence vote, elections set up for Feb

BERLIN, 16 DEC

Chancellor Olaf Scholz lost a confidence vote in the German parliament on Monday, putting the European Union's most populous member and biggest economy on course to hold an early election in late February.

Scholz won the support of 207 lawmakers in the 733-seat lower house, or Bundestag, while 394 voted against him and 116 abstained. That left him far short of the majority of 367 needed to win.

Scholz leads a minority government after his unpopular and notoriously rancorous three-party coalition collapsed on 6 November when he fired his finance minister in a dispute over how to revitalize Germany's stagnant economy. Leaders of several major parties then agreed that a parliamentary election should be held on 23 February, seven months earlier than originally planned.

Olaf Scholz **PHOTO: PTI**

The confidence vote was needed because post-World War II Germany's constitution doesn't allow the Bundestag to dissolve itself. President Frank-Walter Steinmeier has to decide whether to dissolve parliament and call an election.

He has 21 days to make that decision and, because of the planned timing of the election, is expected to do so after Christmas. Scholz told lawmakers that the election will determine whether "we, as a strong country, dare to invest strongly in our future; do we have confidence in ourselves and our country, or do we put our future on the line? Do we risk our cohesion and our prosperity by delaying long-overdue investments?" His pitch to voters includes pledges to "modernise" Germany's strict self-imposed rules on running up debt, to increase the national minimum wage and to reduce value-added tax on food. *—PTI*

- Scholz's pitch to voters includes pledges to "modernise" Germany's strict self-imposed rules on running up debt, to increase the national minimum wage

S Korea seeks to summon Yoon while awaiting court decision

SEOUL, 16 DEC

South Korean law enforcement authorities are pushing to summon impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol for questioning over his short-lived martial law decree as the Constitutional Court began its first meeting on Monday on Yoon's case to determine whether to remove him from office or reinstate him.

A joint investigative team involving police, an anti-corruption agency and the Defense Ministry said it plans to convey a request to Yoon's office that he appear for questioning on Wednesday, as they expand a probe into whether his ill-conceived power grab amounted to rebellion.

Yoon Suk Yeol **PHOTO: X**

Son Yeong-jo, an investigator with the Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials, said the team plans to question Yoon on charges of rebellion and abuse of power. He declined to provide specifics when asked how investigators would respond if Yoon refuses to appear. Son said the team tried to deliver the summons request to the presidential office but was rerouted to Yoon's personal residence after presidential secretarial staff claimed they were unsure whether conveying the request to the impeached president was part of their duties. Yoon was impeached by the opposition-controlled National Assembly on Saturday over his 3 December martial law decree.

If Yoon is dismissed, a national election to choose his successor must be held within 60 days.

Yoon has justified his martial law enforcement as a necessary act of governance against the main liberal opposition Democratic Party that he described as "anti-state forces" bogging down his agendas and vowed to "fight to the end" against efforts to remove him from office. *—PTI*

Ukraine says 30 N Korean troops killed in Ukraine-Russian conflict

KYIV, 16 DEC

Ukraine's military intelligence agency claimed on Monday that around 30 North Korean troops were killed or wounded in fighting against the Ukrainian army at the weekend in Russia's Kursk border region.

The North Korean casualties occurred around three villages in Kursk, where Russia has for four months been trying to quash a Ukrainian incursion, the agency, known by its acronym GUR, said in a public post on the Telegram messaging app.

At least three North Korean servicemen went missing around another Kursk village, GUR said.

It was not possible to independently verify the Ukrainian claims, which are the first reports of North Korean casualties in the almost 3-year war.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov referred questions about the claims to the Russian Defence Ministry, which didn't comment.

North Korea has sent about 10,000 troops to Russia to help it in the war, according to the Pentagon and Ukrainian officials.

North Korea has sent about 10,000 troops to Russia to help with the war, according to the Pentagon and Ukrainian officials **PHOTO: PTI**

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has pledged unwavering support for Russia's full-scale invasion of its neighbour under a mutual defence pact.

Military analysts say the language barrier has bedeviled combat coordination between Russian and North Korean troops.

"The poor integration and ongoing communication problems between Russian and North Korean forces will likely continue to cause friction in Russian military operations in Kursk ... in the near term," the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank, said late Sunday. *—PTI*

Ex-FBI informant to plead guilty in Biden bribery lie

WASHINGTON DC, 16 DEC

A former FBI informant, Alexander Smirnov, is scheduled to enter a guilty plea on Monday in Los Angeles, admitting to lying about a fabricated bribery scheme involving US President Joe Biden and his son, Hunter.

Smirnov is expected to plead guilty to a felony charge related to the false allegations, along with a tax evasion charge linked to a separate case where he concealed millions in income. He has been in custody since his arrest in February for claiming that executives from Ukrainian energy company had paid both Joe and Hunter Biden USD 5 million each circa 2015.

Prosecutors and the defence agreed to recommend a prison sentence of between four and six years, according to the plea agreement. *—PTI*

B'desh polls likely in late 2025 or early 2026: Yunus

DHAKA, 16 DEC

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus announced that Bangladesh's next general election could be scheduled for late 2025 or the first half of 2026, depending on political consensus and necessary reforms. In a televised address on Vijay Diwas, Yunus emphasised the importance of completing major reforms before the elections.

PHOTO: X

"If we can hold it with minor reforms and flawless voter list preparation, it may be possible by the end of 2025," he stated. "However, if comprehensive reforms suggested by the Election Reforms Commission are to be implemented, the election may take at least another six months."

Yunus, who heads the caretaker government after the ousting of Sheikh Hasina's government in August, underscored the crucial task of updating the voter list, particularly for young voters who will be voting for the first time, stating, "We have a big task to ensure all eligible names from the last 15 years are included."

His remarks come amid Bangladesh's celebrations for the 54th Victory Day, marking the liberation from Pakistan in 1971. Yunus referred to the day as particularly significant following the removal of what he termed the "world's worst autocratic government." During celebrations, he paid tribute to the martyrs of the Liberation War but notably did not mention the country's founding leader, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

This year's Victory Day celebrations has shifted to include a range of public events aimed at fostering community involvement. *—PTI*

Serbia spying on Oppn, journalists: Amnesty

LONDON, 16 DEC

Serbia's secret service and police have been spying on journalists and opposition activists by installing a spyware on their mobile phones, Amnesty International said on Monday.

The watchdog's report, backed by testimonies of those who claim their phones have been hacked in recent months, says the spy software was used to unlock phones to capture covert screenshots and copy contact lists, which were then uploaded to a government-controlled server.

The report titled "A Digital Prison: Surveillance and the Suppression of Civil Society in Serbia" said the Serbian police and the Security Information Agency (BIA) used the spyware to infect devices while their owners were detained or interviewed by police.

Serbia's spy agency said that it "works exclusively in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Serbia."

"Therefore, we are not even able to comment on nonsensical allegations from their (Amnesty) text, just as we do not normally comment on similar content," BIA said.

The Amnesty report comes as President Aleksandar Vucic is facing one of the biggest challenges to more than a decade of his increasingly autocratic rule, with widening anti-government protests that so far have been largely peaceful. Protests have been led by university students and opposition activists following the collapse last month of a concrete canopy at a railway station that killed 15 people on 1 November.

Many believe corruption and nepotism among state officials led to sloppy work on the building reconstruction, which was part of a wider railroad project with Chinese state companies. *—PTI*

CHARGED WITH MANSLAUGHTER

12-year-old girl charged with killing Indian-origin man in UK

LONDON, 16 DEC

A 12-year-old girl on Monday became the second person to be charged in connection with the killing of 80-year-old Bhim Sen Kohli, who died following an assault while out walking his dog in a park near Leicester, eastern England, in September.

Leicestershire Police said the girl, who cannot be named for legal reasons due to being a minor, appeared at Leicester Youth Court sitting at Leicester Magistrates' Court charged with manslaughter. A 15-year-old boy, then aged 14, arrested following the fatal assault and charged with Kohli's murder remains in custody.

Bhim Sen Kohli **PHOTO: X**

"A 12-year-old girl has been charged following the death of Bhim Kohli in September. The girl, who cannot be named for legal reasons, has been charged with manslaughter," the police said.

- Five children aged 12-14 years were arrested following the death of Kohli in hospital on 2 September

Five children aged 12-14 years were arrested following the death of Kohli in hospital on 2 September. Kohli's family had released a statement via the police at the time to say they were heartbroken and struggling to cope with the loss of a loving and caring person.

A post-mortem examination carried out after his death in hospital following the attack at Franklin Park in Braunstone Town confirmed the cause of death as a neck injury, while further tests were to be carried out."The circumstances surrounding Mr Kohli's death are extremely tragic and upsetting not only for his family and friends but also the wider community," Detective Inspector Emma Matts, Senior Investigating Officer at Leicestershire Police, said at the time.

Now that suspects have been charged in the case, further details in the case will be restricted to prevent any interventions that may prejudice a murder trial *—PTI*

PHOTO:ANI

Gold slumps ₹1,150; silver declines ₹300

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Gold prices slumped for the second straight session by Rs 1,150 to Rs 78,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday on frantic selling by stockists and retailers, the All India Sarafa Association said. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity closed at Rs 79,500 per 10 grams on Friday. Silver also declined Rs 300 to Rs 92,500 per kg. The white metal finished at Rs 92,800 per kg in the previous trading session. In the last two trading sessions, it had plummeted Rs 4,500 per kg. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity slipped Rs 1,150 to Rs 77,950 per 10 grams on Monday. *—PTI*

JSW Energy achieves generation capacity of 20 GW

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

JSW Energy on Monday said it has secured multiple renewable energy projects in the commercial and industrial power market, achieving a total locked-in generation capacity of 20 GW. The company's locked-in renewable energy commercial and industrial (C&I) capacity stood at 3.1 GW, which includes 2,654 MW of JSW group captive capacity and 445 MW of third-party C&I capacity, a JSW Energy statement said.

Currently, the operational C&I capacity of the company stood at 488 MW, it informed. The company's step-down subsidiaries have executed power purchase agreements (PPAs) with DCM Shriram Ltd and Indus Towers Ltd for the supply of renewable energy.

These strategic partnerships underscore the company's commitment towards sustainable energy solutions. Subsequent to this, the company's total locked-in generation capacity has increased to 20 GW. JSW Energy aims to achieve 10 GW operational capacity by FY25. *—PTI*

Coal India spends Rs 1,209 cr on solar projects

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

State-owned CIL has spent a total of Rs 1,209 crore on ground-mounted solar power projects having a capacity of 661 MW, the government on Monday said. Coal India Ltd (CIL) has a plan to achieve 3,000 MW solar project capacity by 2027-28 which consists of 211.59 MW in the current fiscal, 697.85 MW in FY26, 1,235 MW in FY27 and 785 MW in FY28, Coal and mines minister G Kishan Reddy said in reply to Rajya Sabha. The minister further said that Singareni Collieries Company Ltd has spent Rs 1,182.60 crore on solar projects while NLC India Ltd has spent Rs 6,723.59 crore on such projects. CIL accounts for over 80 per cent of domestic coal production. *—PTI*

ServiceNow names Ganesh as MD, Group VP for India

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

American software firm ServiceNow on Monday announced the appointment of Ganesh Lakshminarayanan as Managing Director (MD) and Group Vice President (GVP) for its India and SAARC business, effective 6 January, 2025. Based out of Bengaluru, he will be instrumental in strengthening ServiceNow's position across the APAC region, according to a company statement

Lakshminarayanan brings extensive experience, having previously served as the CEO of Airtel's domestic B2B operations. Prior to his tenure at Airtel, he was the President and Managing Director of Dell India. He will report to ServiceNow APAC President Detlef Krause. India represents more than 20 per cent of ServiceNow's global workforce, with over 40 per cent of the company's global product engineering driven from the country. *—PTI*

WPI inflation declines to 3-month low of 1.89%

Decline was on cheaper food rate; RBI may cut interest rates

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Wholesale price based inflation declined to a 3-month low of 1.89 per cent in November on cheaper food items, and experts predicted a 0.25 per cent interest rate cut by the RBI in the policy review in February.

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI) based inflation was 2.36 per cent in October 2024. It was 0.39 per cent in November, last year. In August, 2024, it was 1.25 per cent.

As per the data, inflation in food items eased to 8.63 per cent in November, as against 13.54 per cent in October. The decline was led by a dip in vegetable inflation which stood at 28.57 per cent, as against 63.04 per cent in October.

Inflation in potato, however, continued to be high at 82.79 per cent, while in onion it fell sharply to 2.85 per cent in November.

As per the data, inflation in food items eased to 8.63 per cent in November, as against 13.54 per cent in October PHOTO: ANI

The fuel and power category witnessed a deflation of 5.83 per cent in November, against a deflation of 5.79 per cent in October. In manufactured items, inflation was 2 per cent in November, against 1.50 per cent in October.

In a research note, Barclays said wholesale price inflation softened in November, on lower primary food inflation, which more than offset higher inflation seen in manufactured products.

As per the consumer price index data released last week, retail inflation moderated to 5.5 per cent in November, compared with 6.2 per cent in October.

The government appointed a new RBI Governor earlier this month. Former Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra took over as the 26th RBI Governor on December 11 replacing Shaktikanta Das.

In October, the government had reconstituted the 6-member MPC.

ICRA expects the headline WPI inflation to rise to 2.5-3 per cent in December 2024 (+0.9% in December 2023) despite a favourable base. *—PTI*

Mkt declines amid weak global trends

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

PHOTO:PTI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower on Monday due to weak global cues amid caution ahead of the US Fed interest rate decision later this week.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 384.55 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 81,748.57. During the day, it dropped 581.84 points or 0.70 per cent to 81,551.28.

The NSE Nifty lost by 100.05 points or 0.40 per cent to 24,668.25.

From the 30-share Sensex blue-chip pack, Titan, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement, Tata Consultancy Services, NTPC, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever and JSW Steel were the biggest laggards.

On the other hand, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, Power Grid, Mahindra & Mahindra and Axis Bank were the gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

European markets were quoting in the red. Wall Street ended mostly lower on Friday.

Meanwhile, wholesale price-based inflation declined to a three-month low of 1.89 per cent in November on cheaper food items.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 2,335.32 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.75 per cent to USD 73.91 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 843.16 points or 1.04 per cent to settle at 82,133.12 on Friday. The Nifty climbed 219.60 points or 0.89 per cent to settle at 24,768.30. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 9P to all-time low of 84.89 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

The rupee depreciated by 9 paise to close at an all-time low level of 84.89 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, dragged down by a negative trend in domestic equities.

Forex traders said the Indian rupee declined on weak domestic markets and rising US bond yields. However, a soft US dollar cushioned the downside.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.83 and touched 84.89 against the greenback during intraday trade. The unit finally ended the session 9 paise down at 84.89 (provisional) against the dollar.

On Friday, the rupee rebounded from its all-time low level and settled with a gain of 8 paise at 84.80 against the US dollar.

The unit's previous all-time low level was recorded on December 12 when it closed at 84.88 against dollar.

However, FII inflows and cooling off of inflation may support the rupee at lower levels.

The unit's previous all-time low level was recorded on 12 Dec PHOTO: PTI

On the domestic macroeconomic front, wholesale price-based inflation declined to a 3-month low of 1.89 per cent in November on cheaper food items.

Retail inflation declined in November to 5.48 per cent and came within the Reserve Bank's comfort zone mainly due to easing food prices, creating headroom for a rate cut at the central bank's rate-setting panel meeting under new Governor Sanjay Malhotra in February.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading marginally lower by 0.14 per cent at 106.85.

Meanwhile, India's forex reserves dropped by USD 3.235 billion to USD 654.857 billion for the week ended 6 December, the RBI said on Friday. *—PTI*

PETITIONER FINED RS 50,000

HC rejects plea against Adani's power contract

MUMBAI, 16 DEC

Bombay High Court on Monday dismissed a petition challenging a contract awarded by the Maharashtra government to Adani Group for supply of renewable and thermal power electricity, noting the plea was "unsubstantiated and reckless".

A division bench of Chief Justice DK Upadhyaya and Justice Amit Borkar also imposed a cost of Rs 50,000 on the petitioner - Shriraj Nageshwar Aepurwar - for the vague petition.

Aepurwar alleged the contract awarded to the Adani Group for the supply of 6,600 megawatts of renewable and thermal power was a violation of the petitioner's fundamental right to have access to fair electricity supply at a reasonable rate.

The plea also levelled allegations against former state chief minister Eknath Shinde, who is currently the deputy CM, of having been involved in corrupt practices while awarding the contract to Adani Group.

The bench, however, refused to accept the contentions and said, "In our opinion, filing of such petitions containing unsubstantiated and reckless averments run the risk of sometimes even good causes being lost."

The petition made "vague and unsubstantiated" assertions that the contract awarded was a scam involving government authorities, it noted.

The HC said the petition did not contain any supporting materials to show the former chief minister (Shinde) was involved in any corrupt practices.

The petitioner was not a participant in the tender process of the contract, the court added.

The court directed the Rs 50,000 cost to be deposited by the petitioner to the Maharashtra State Legal Services Authority. *—PTI*

INDIAN ECONOMY'S DEC PMI HITS 60.7

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

HSBC Flash India Composite Output Index, which tracks combined output across manufacturing and services, rose to 60.7 in December from 58.6 in November, signaling the strongest expansion since August 2024, according to HSBC data compiles by S&P Global.

India's private sector witnessed robust growth in December, marking its highest performance in four months. Both the manufacturing and services sectors showed accelerated growth, supported by increased new business inflows and heightened job creation.

The HSBC Flash India Manufacturing PMI improved to 57.4 in December, up from November's 56.5, indicating stronger business conditions. Gains in production, new orders, and employment drove the recovery, supported by a rise in domestic demand.

The services sector continued to lead the growth momentum, as reflected in the HSBC Flash India Services PMI Business Activity Index, which climbed to 60.8 in December from 58.4 in November. Service providers recorded a sharper rise in sales and backlogs, highlighting the sector's resilience.

Private sector firms expanded their workforce significantly in December, with job creation reaching a new survey peak.

Employers added both permanent and temporary staff to meet the growing demand, while backlogs of work increased at the fastest pace since May 2024.*—PTI*

PHOTO:X

Exports fall 4.85% to $32.11B in November

NEW DELHI,16 DEC

India's merchandise exports in November dipped by 4.85 per cent to USD 32.11 billion against USD 33.75 billion a year ago, according to government data released on Monday. Imports increased by 27 per cent to USD 69.95 billion in November compared to USD 55.06 billion in the year-ago month. Gold imports in November reached an all-time high of USD 14.8 billion. The trade deficit, or the gap between imports and exports, widened to USD 37.84 billion during the month under review. The country's merchandise exports had increased by 17.25 per cent to USD 39.2 billion in October this year. During April-November, exports increased by 2.17 per cent to USD 284.31 billion and imports by 8.35 per cent to USD 486.73 billion. *—PTI*

Multiple IPOs set to launch on 19 Dec with exciting opportunities

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

A flurry of Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) are set to commence on 19 December, with three companies announcing their price bands and projected fundraising efforts.

Concord Enviro Systems, an environmental engineering firm, has fixed a price range of Rs 665-701 per share for its IPO, which will remain open until 23 December. The offering includes a fresh issue worth Rs 175 crore and an Offer For Sale of 46.41 lakh equity shares valued at Rs 325.33 crore. The company aims to raise funds for a new water treatment systems assembly unit and expansion of its manufacturing facilities.

Transrail Lighting Ltd also plans to open its IPO on December 19, pricing shares between Rs 410-432. The Mumbai-based EPC company seeks to raise Rs 839 crore through a fresh issue of Rs 400 crore and an OFS of 1.01 crore equity shares by its promoter, Ajanma Holdings. The proceeds will be allocated towards working capital and capital expenditure.

PHOTO:X

- These IPOs represent diverse sectors and offer investors a chance to tap into burgeoning Indian companies, with listings expected on the NSE and BSE shortly after

Meanwhile, Sanathan Textiles has set its IPO price at Rs 305-321 per share to raise Rs 550 crore, which includes a fresh issue of Rs 400 crore and Rs 150 crore from an OFS. Funds will primarily be used for debt repayment and expansion within its subsidiary.

Additionally, GK Energy Ltd has filed preliminary papers with Sebi aiming to raise Rs 500 crore through a combination of fresh shares and an OFS, with proceeds aimed at bolstering working capital.

These IPOs represent diverse sectors and offer investors a chance to tap into burgeoning Indian companies, with listings expected on the NSE and BSE shortly after. *—PTI*

'A SEASONED GOOGLER'

Preeti now Google's Vice Prez for India

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

Tech giant Google on Monday announced the appointment of Preeti Lobana as the new country manager and vice president for India.

She succeeds Sanjay Gupta, who recently transitioned to an elevated role as President of the Asia Pacific region at Google.

As the new Country Manager and Vice President for India, Lobana will play a key role in shaping Google's strategy to bring the transformative power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to all customers, fostering innovation, a Google release said.

"A seasoned Googler with eight years of experience as Vice President of customer-centric solutions, Preeti will now spearhead Google India's sales and operations, driving the company's commitment to India's burgeoning digital economy," according to the release.

PHOTO: X

- In her new role, Lobana will partner deeply with Roma Datta Chobey, who led as the interim country manager and will continue her leadership as Managing Director for Google India's Digital Native Industries

Sanjay Gupta, President of Asia-Pacific, Google said India's vibrant digital landscape has been a source of immense inspiration and innovation for the company.

In her new role, Lobana will partner deeply with Roma Datta Chobey, who led as the interim country manager and will continue her leadership as Managing Director for Google India's Digital Native Industries.

Her career has been marked by a consistent focus on business transformation, operational excellence, and customer experience.

Most recently, she served as Google's Vice President, gTech - Process, Partner, Publisher Operations, Ads Content and Quality Operations, leading a global team and driving innovative ad solutions and support for Google's customers and partners.

Before Google, she held leadership positions at NatWest Group, American Express, Standard Chartered Bank and ANZ Grindlays Bank, where she specialised in areas of business strategy, product management, and operational excellence across diverse markets in India. *—PTI*

By 2030, India needs ₹16K cr to meet EV charging demands

NEW DELHI, 16 DEC

PHOTO:ANI

A recent report by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) highlights that India will require capital expenditure of Rs 16,000 crore by 2030 to meet public electric vehicle (EV) charging demands and achieve the goal of over 30 per cent electrification.

The 'FICCI EV Public Charging Infrastructure Roadmap 2030', released on Monday, emphasises the need for higher utilisation rates of charging stations to ensure profitability and scalability. It suggests prioritising the development of public charging infrastructure in the top 40 cities, which are expected to experience significant EV penetration in the next three to five years due to current adoption rates and supportive state policies.

The report asserts that with the right demand and supply enablers, India can effectively meet its electrification mission by 2030. The growth in EV uptake is influenced by five interdependent factors: economics, battery technology, regulations, consumer demand, and charging infrastructure.

To incentivise EV growth, the Indian government has introduced various schemes, including the PM E-DRIVE initiative. Additionally, reduced GST rates on EVs, alongside state-level incentives. *—ANI*

BGT: Rain plays spoilsport as India end at 51/4

On Day 3 of 3rd Test, Kohli was once again dismissed for a single-digit score; Bumrah defends team

BRISBANE, 16 DEC

The Indian batters' inability to grind it out against a relentless Australian pace attack in testing conditions left the team precariously placed at 51 for four at the end of a rain-marred day three of the third Test here on Monday.

On a stop-start day, India bowled out Australia for 445 in their first innings, the hosts adding 40 runs to their overnight total, as the peerless Jasprit Bumrah continued to do the heavy lifting to finish with excellent figures of 6/76.

Alex Carey chipped in with an entertaining 70 off 88 balls after contrasting hundreds by Steve Smith and Travis Head on the second day laid the foundation for a total which looked more than enough just 14 overs into the Indian first innings.

With the exception of the gutsy KL Rahul (33 batting), who was willing to hang in there, none of the Indian top-order batters showed the stomach to fight.

Pat Cummins got the big wicket of Rishabh Pant in the second session to make matters worse for the Indians.

Kohli was dismissed for a single-digit score in what has now become a familiar scene as he once again chased a length delivery outside off before nicking it to Alex Carey.

This is the fourth time Kohli has been dismissed in such a fashion. Former India player Sanjay Manjrekar has already advised him to explore an alternate route to tackle his weaknesses against deliveries on the fourth and fifth stump.

Meanwhile, Bumrah defended the struggling Indian team and played down talk of additional pressure on him, saying it's a side in transition and given his experience, it's his "job" to shoulder extra responsibility.

"We don't, as a team, point fingers at each other and we don't want to get into that mindset where we are pointing fingers at each other that 'you should do this, you should do that'," Bumrah told media after stumps when asked for his assessment of India's batting. —*PTI*

On a stop-start day, India bowled out Australia for 445 in their first innings on Monday **PHOTO: X**

> **He (Kohli) only needs to look at his hero, Sachin Tendulkar. The way in which Tendulkar had kept his patience and control on his off-side game, scoring those 241 runs at Sydney**
>
> -Sunil Gavaskar

India aim to improve fielding against West Indies in 2nd WT20I

Navi Mumbai, 16 DEC

A comprehensive 49-run win in the series opener in the bag, India will look to iron out their perpetual flaws in fielding when they take on the West Indies in the second women's T20I here on Tuesday. Give a short turnaround time between their final ODI in Australia and the opening T20I here on Sunday, India produced a near-perfect performance to extend their winning streak to nine wins against the Caribbean side in T20Is. But the persistent issue of being ordinary in the field came forth once again when each of Jemimah Rodrigues, 73, Smriti Mandhana, 54, and Saima Thakor spilled a regulation catch each. Thakor dropped Qiana Joseph, 49, when she was on 34 and the dangerous Deandra Dottin, who smacked a 28-ball 52 (4x4s, 3x6s), was dropped once each by Rodrigues and Mandhana when she was on a flourish. The dropped catches somewhat marred excellent efforts in the field by Minnu Manu, who had substituted Harmanpreet Kaur as the Indian captain missed most of India's fielding innings due to an unspecified issue. Shortly after India's win, the coaching staff got working with youngsters Priya Mishra, Raghvi Bisht and Nandini Kashyap for a session of catching practice even though the nip in the air made their task difficult. But as the team keeps putting their efforts to improve fielding, mistakes drag them down. —*PTI*

ISA GUHA CALLS BUMRAH 'PRIMATE'

BRISBANE, 16 DEC

Former England player and commentator Isa Guha, who referred to Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah as a "primate" during the third Test between India and Australia here, apologised for her racist remark on Monday. She said she was "deeply sorry" for choosing a wrong word to describe the India pacer's brilliant display with the ball. "Well, he's the MVP, isn't he? Most valuable primate, Jasprit Bumrah," Guha had said while commentating for Fox Cricket. The usage of the word "primate" by Guha caused a social media storm.

PHOTO:X

Kerala Blasters sack head coach after poor shows in ISL

KOCHI, 16 DEC

Kerala Blasters FC on Monday announced the termination of services of their head coach Mikael Stahre with immediate effect after a string of poor performances by the club in the ongoing Indian Super League. Assistant coaches Bjorn Wesstrom and Frederico Pereira Morais have also left the club, along with Stahre. "The club sincerely thanks Mikael, Bjorn, and Frederico for their contributions throughout their time with Kerala Blasters FC. We wish them nothing but success in their future endeavours," the club said in a statement. "The new head coach will be announced in due course." Till the new appointment is confirmed, reserve team head coach and head of youth development, Tomasz Tchorz, and assistant coach TG Purushothaman will take over the responsibility of managing team. —*PTI*

India, China among junior World Cup qualifiers

LAUSANNE, 16 DEC

Finishing in the top 5 positions of the Women's Asia Junior Cup 2024 played in Muscat (Oman), India, China, Japan, Korea and Malaysia have qualified for the FIH Hockey Women's Junior World Cup Chile 2025 which, for the very first time, has been expanded to include 24 teams from around the world! India, China, Japan and Korea finished in the top 2 spots of their respective pools, therefore qualifying not only for the semi-finals of the tournament but also securing their ticket to the World Cup. The first semi-final of the 2024 Women's Asia Junior Cup pitted India against Japan. Scoring 3 goals in the first quarter, Indians won (3-1). —*ANI*

World Squash C'ships: Indian men finish 5th

HONG KONG, 16 DEC

Indian men secured an impressive fifth-place finish, while the women ended in a commendable seventh position at the World Team Squash Championship here. The Indian men upset fifth seeds Malaysia, while the women defeated nine-time champions Australia on their way to the quarterfinals. In the last-eight stage, the Indian men's team, comprising Abhay Singh and Veer Chotrani, lost to France 0-2, while women's team went against USA. —*PTI*

Williamson scores 156 as NZ sets England 658 to win

Kane Williamson during 3rd day of 3rd Test against England **PHOTO: PTI**

HAMILTON, 16 DEC

Kane Williamson made 156 as New Zealand amassed a lead of 657 runs before both England openers were dismissed to leave the hosts in a commanding position at the end of the third day of the third cricket test on Monday.

To compound an already dimsal day for the tourists, England captain Ben Stokes limped from the field with a recurrence of a hamstring injury.

Williamson's 33rd test century was his seventh at Seddon Park and his fifth in consecutive tests on a home ground on which he averages more than 100.

New Zealand finally was dismissed for 453 after leading by 204 on the first innings and in five overs before stumps England slumped to 18-2.

Stokes was bowling the second ball of his 13th over when, on his follow-through, he clutched at the hamstring of his left leg.

Stokes suffered a serious injury to his left hamstring while playing in The Hundred in August for the Northern Superchargers against the Manchester Originals. Ollie Pope took over the captaincy in Stokes' absence.

The entire first session on the third day was lost to rain and a damp outfield. Play resumed at 1.30 with New Zealand 136-3, Williamson 50 not out and Ravindra 2. —*PTI*

Bangladesh beats West Indies by 7 runs in 1st T20

KINGSTOWN, 16 DEC

Bangladesh opened its three-match Twenty20 series against West Indies with a tight seven-run win.

At 61-7 in the 12th over the West Indies looked a long-shot to get close to Bangladesh's 147-6 off 20 overs but some lusty hitting from captain Rovman Powell got the hosts within 10 runs from the final over to steal victory.

But Bangladesh seamer Hasan Mahmud (2-18) produced a stunning last over and dismissed Powell (60 off 35 balls) and two balls later ended the match by bowling Alzarri Joseph with the final delivery to leave the West Indies reply at 140 all out.

Earlier, opener Soumya Sarkar top-scored for Bangladesh with a breezy 43 from 32 balls, with two boundaries and three sixes.

The second match is on Wednesday and the third match is on Friday with all three games to be played at Kingstown, St. Vincent. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Barcelona falls to Leganes, Madrid levels in La Liga

BARCELONA, 16 DEC

Barcelona maintained its position at the top of La Liga despite a surprising 1-0 defeat to struggling Leganes, a team that had been winless away from home this season. Atletico Madrid capitalised on Barcelona's misstep, edging Getafe 1-0 to move into second place, both teams now on 38 points but with Barcelona boasting a superior difference.

This latest round of fixtures sets up a tantalising encounter between the two top teams at Camp Nou next Saturday.

In a thrilling Basque derby, Alaves and Athletic Bilbao played out a 1-1 draw, interrupting Athletic's six-match winning streak. Alaves, without a win since November, fell behind early but equalised through a goalkeeping error

Meanwhile, Real Betis extended their unbeaten run to four matches with a 2-1 victory over Villarreal, despite playing most of the game with ten men. —*PTI*

PSG tops Ligue 1 with 3-1 win over Lyon

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

Paris Saint-Germain extended their lead at the top of Ligue 1 to seven points with a 3-1 victory over Lyon, albeit with the match briefly interrupted due to homophobic chanting from fans.

The hosts started strongly at the Parc des Princes, leading 2-0 within the first 14 minutes thanks to goals from Ousmane Dembélé and Vitinha, who converted a penalty. Lyon responded before half-time with a goal from Georges Mikautadze. Gonzalo Ramos sealed the win for PSG in the 88th minute with a close-range finish.

The match was marred when referee Benoit Bastien halted play in the 53rd minute, urging fans to cease the discriminatory chants. The action resumed following a reminder displayed on the stadium screens. —*PTI*

KOLKATA TEEN ANSHUL SECURES 123RD AMATEUR GOLF TITLE

CHANDIGARH, 16 DEC

Kolkata teenager Anshul Mishra overcame Karnataka's Varun Muthappa to add his name to a list of illustrious winners of the iconic All India Amateur Golf championship here.

The 123rd edition of the event, one of the oldest in the world, saw 16-year-old Mishra beat Muthappa in the 36-hole final 4&3. That meant he was four up with three holes to go.

The All India Amateurs is the biggest amateur event in the IGU portfolio.

Mishra, who started his golf at the Royal Calcutta Golf Course under Inderjit Bhalotia, now trains with Jesse Grewal. He plans to try and play in US College golf. —*PTI*

Suryansh Shedge: Mumbai's SMAT star

BENGALURU, 16 DEC

Thirty six is an important number in Suryansh Shedge's fledgling career. The two unbeaten 36s in the span of five days during the just-concluded Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy showcased the bubbling talent and maturity inside this 21-year-old from Mumbai.

The first 36 (12 balls) came on December 11 at Alur against Vidarbha. Mumbai needed 65 runs off 29 balls and Shedge took Mandar Mahale to cleaners, striking him for 6, 6, 6, 4 to bring the equation down to more manageable levels.

The second 36 (15 balls) came on Sunday in the SMAT final against Madhya Pradesh. Shedge walked in when Mumbai needed 46 from 34 balls — not tough in T20s but the pressure of the final could make difference.

However, Shedge coolly clobbered Venkatesh Iyer for two sixes before smashing Tripuresh Singh for 4, 6, 6 to put a lid on the match.

Being a finisher in T20s can be a nerve-jangling job even for the seasoned names, and this young man has pulled it off under pressure. —*PTI*

Man U pulls off 2-1 comeback over Man City

MANCHESTER, 16 DEC

Amad Diallo scored a dramatic last-minute winner as Manchester United pulled off a remarkable comeback to defeat Manchester City 2-1 in the Premier League. The match, held at the Etihad Stadium on December 16, saw City leading 1-0 thanks to Josko Gvardiol's header in the 36th minute. However, in a thrilling finale, Bruno Fernandes equalised from the penalty spot in the 89th minute after Diallo was fouled by Matheus Nunes.

> **I'm the boss, I'm the manager and I'm not good enough. It's as simple as that**
>
> -Josep Guardiola Sala, Man City manager

United's head coach Ruben Amorim, celebrating his first victory in the Manchester derby, said, "It was a very tough match but we believe until the end. It was important for us and for our fans."

In other fixtures, Chelsea closed the gap on league leaders Liverpool with a 2-1 victory against Brentford, marking their seventh straight win. Southampton's woes deepened as they sacked manager Russell Martin following a heavy 5-0 defeat to Tottenham. Crystal Palace secured a 3-1 win over Brighton —*PTI*

WORLD CHAMPION RETURNS

Gukesh lands in Chennai to grand welcome

CHENNAI, 16 DEC

Newly-crowned world chess champion D Gukesh returned home to an enthusiastic reception as hundreds of eager fans, and officials from the Tamil Nadu government and the national federation lined up to receive him at the airport here on Monday.

The 18-year-old defeated China's Ding Liren 7.5-6.5 in Singapore last week to become the youngest ever world champion, overhauling the long-standing mark set by Russian icon Garry Kasparov as a 22-year-old back in 1985.

Upon his arrival, Gukesh thanked everyone for supporting him.

"It's amazing. Your support gave me a lot of energy. It's a great feeling to win the world championship," said Gukesh as media and fans jostled to get a closer view of the youngster.

"It means a lot to bring back trophy to India. Thank you for this reception. I hope we will have a great time in the next few days celebrating together," he added.

D Gukesh with his parents in Chennai, on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

Once he touched base at the Kamaraj airport, the Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu and his school Velammal Vidyala staff greeted him with a bouquet before draping a shawl around him at the airport lounge.

Gukesh started his chess journey at the Velammal school.

On Tuesday, he will be given a grand reception at the Kalaivanar Arangam at Wallahjah Road and he will be taken to the iconic auditorium in a specially-arranged parade.

Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin is expected to be present during the function to present Gukesh with a cheque of Rs five crore.

Gukesh is only the second Indian after the great Viswanathan Anand to claim the world title. Anand played a pivotal role in shaping the teenager at his academy here. —*PTI*

Carlsen, Gukesh showdown to headline Norway Chess

Stavanger, 16 DEC

The youngest-ever world champion, Gukesh Dommaraju will take on Magnus Carlsen, the world's highest-rated player, in a highly-anticipated contest at next year's Norway Chess. The tournament will take place in Stavanger from 26 May to 6 June, 2025. "I'm excited to face the strongest players in the world again in Norway and also the Armageddons will be fun," Gukesh said in a media release. In 2023, Gukesh finished third in Stavanger. Now, he's back as World Champion, ready to challenge Carlsen on home soil. Will the rising star seize victory, or will Carlsen's experience and home advantage prevail? —*PTI*